STORIES OF INSPIRATION
Mystery Fiction Edition
Volume 1

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AND A PREFACE BY HOLLY ROBINSON

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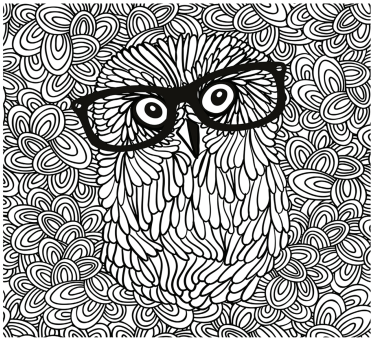
PREFACE BY HOLLY ROBINSON

EDITED AND WITH AN INTRODUCTION
BY SUZANNE FOX



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Stories of Inspiration: Mystery Fiction Edition, Volume 1

Book design by cj Madigan

Dedicated to
readers, writers, and mystery mavens everywhere

and with profound appreciation for both
our contributing authors and their legions of fans

I have never felt the slightest inclination to apologize for my tastes; nor to shrink from declaring that the mystery or detective novel boldly upholds the principle, in defiance of contemporary sentiment, that infinite Mystery, beyond that of the finite, may yield to human ratiocination: that truth will "out"…

—Joyce Carol Oates, *Mysteries of Winterthurn*

It's a damn good story. If you have any comments, write them on the back of a check.

—Erle Stanley Gardner, *note on a submitted manuscript*

The true alchemists do not change lead into gold. They change the world into words.

—William H. Gass, *A Temple of Texts*

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HOLLY ROBINSON

PREFACE

Why We Love Mystery Novels: Murder, Mayhem, and Cultural Mirrors

I was breakfasting on scrambled eggs this morning while reading about children who were murdered in their sleep.

"Good book, honey?" my husband asked.

When I told him what it was about, he shook his head and beat a hasty retreat.

The older I get, the more I love mystery novels. I'm clearly not alone. A few years ago, I celebrated my daughter's high school graduation by taking her on one of those el-cheapo cruises from Boston to Bermuda. At first it was every nightmare described in "Shipping Out," the late David Foster Wallace's 1996 essay about cruise ships, right down to the "suntan lotion spread over 2,100 pounds of hot flesh."

Then I discovered a very important fact about cruise ships: when you get tired of listening to the steel drums and dancing in that conga line around the pool on the top deck, you can join the mystery readers two decks down. There, you can happily tuck under a blanket on a

shady lounge chair and read about bodies being tossed everywhere from car trunks to, yes, the open sea.

Most of us who are avid readers as adults probably cut our teeth on mysteries. For me, Trixie Belden and Nancy Drew led the way. Through my grandfather, I discovered Raymond Chandler, P.D. James, Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers in my teens.

I drifted away from mysteries for a while, delving deeply into literary fiction as I proceeded through college and graduate school. Once I started having children, though, I returned to the mystery genre as my go-to escape from mundane matters such as toddler tantrums and vacuuming.

You might think any loving mom like me would steer clear of murder. You would be wrong. I've raised five children while reading about victims being stabbed, hanged, bludgeoned, gassed, thrown off cliffs, burned, and generally disposed of in unpleasant ways. Mystery novels have kept me sane, I swear.

This summer, I have devoured so many amazing mystery novels that I started analyzing why this genre appeals to me so much. It isn't just about loving books with plots that leave you with whiplash. No, I'm more inclined to love character-driven books. But the very best mystery novels give us those living, breathing, believable characters and haunting descriptions, too. They are also cultural mirrors of the best sort, revealing life's truths in emotionally profound ways.

The book I was reading over breakfast this morning, for instance, was *Broken Harbor*. Written by the brilliant Irish novelist Tana French, *Broken Harbor* is told from the point of view of a detective who just might be losing his mind. The murders take place in one of those new, shoddily constructed developments on the sea, and

the backdrop is today's economic crisis and housing market woes. Along with trying to solve the murders, you're led to understand the despair of those in the middle class who thought they had it all but were left with nothing during the recent recession.

Before that, I stayed up late for two nights straight to finish Gillian Flynn's equally mesmerizing *Gone Girl*. This novel centers on a missing woman and the husband accused of having murdered her and gotten rid of the body in some amazingly clever way. Again, the backdrop is the economic crisis—both the husband and his wife have been badly impacted by the downturn. More importantly, the novel lays out the big questions about why so many loving relationships fail.

With Canadian writer Louise Penny's sizzling series featuring the honorable, dignified Inspector Armand Gamache, I have learned all about the French-English tensions in Quebec, not to mention what it's like to make a living as an artist married to another painter whose work is perhaps not quite as good as your own, leading to professional envy and marital tensions. And British writer Elly Griffiths writes lush, moody mystery novels featuring an archaeologist who keeps being reminded—and reminding us—of how important it is to heed the lessons of the past.

Finally, one indie series that had me riveted from the start is Toby Neal's Lei Crime Series. (Full disclosure: although we've never met in person, Toby and I have become friends via social media, but I first contacted her because I loved her writing in *Blood Orchids*.) A practicing social worker in Hawaii, Toby writes fast-paced crime novels that will keep you turning the pages (or pressing buttons). As you read them, however, you can't help but marvel at the way

Neal lays out the economic, social, and cultural issues of Hawaii. You come away from these books—and all of those celebrated in *Stories of Inspiration: Mystery Fiction Edition*—with much, much more than just another murderer apprehended.

So I'll keep devouring mysteries with my breakfasts, thank you, as I open window after window offering fresh perspectives on the world we live in.

Novelist, journalist and celebrity ghost writer **HOLLY ROBINSON** is the author of several books, including *The Gerbil Farmer's Daughter: A Memoir* and the novels *The Wishing Hill, Beach Plum Island, Haven Lake,* and *Chance Harbor*. Her newest novel, *Folly Cove*, appeared from Berkley Publishing Group/Penguin Random House in early October 2016. Holly's articles and essays appear frequently in publications such as *Cognoscenti, The Huffington Post, More, Parents, Redbook* and dozens of other newspapers and magazines. She and her husband have five children and a stubborn Pekingese. They divide their time between Massachusetts and Prince Edward Island, and are crazy enough to be fixing up old houses one shingle at a time in both places. Connect with Holly on Facebook, Twitter and at www.authorhollyrobinson.com.

SUZANNE FOX

INTRODUCTION

Seeds of Crime

A crime is committed. Usually a murder, though in an exceptional work like Dorothy Sayers' *Gaudy Night*, a lesser offense can sometimes offer the necessary moral weight and tension.

Someone tries to figure out the who, how, and why of the crime.

Justice is, or is not, done.

That's a brief synopsis of pretty much every single mystery novel ever written.

Doesn't sound all that promising, does it?

But of course, it is. It's difficult to know the number of mystery books in print today, as different lists have different categories, terminology and limitations. Simply because it's immediately visible, let's use the numbers on book-selling behemoth Amazon.com. As I write this, 298, 848 books are listed for sale in their "Mystery, Thriller & Suspense" category. When you add in all of the mystery-related novels that are listed in other categories—literary novels, coming-of-age tales, or romances with a compelling crime or mystery element,

for example—as well as all of the mysteries that are still beloved but no longer for sale, you begin to get a sense of just how large the mystery marketplace is.

Why are books built around such an apparently limited premise so many and so popular? On one end of the spectrum of answers to that question are the sages who have written about the genre—a list that includes luminaries such as poet W.H. Auden, historian-philosopher Jacques Barzun, and polymath Joyce Carol Oates. They muse on profound conundrums like the puzzle that is evil and the primal human impulses both to do wrong and to seek justice. On the other, there's the (ostensibly) simple fact that the built-in characteristics of a mystery—action, urgency, danger, resourcefulness, resolution—naturally lend themselves to the spinning of great yarns. Or, as Perry Mason creator Erle Stanley Gardner famously told an editor, "It's a damn good story. If you have any comments, write them on the back of a check."

I don't have the space here to dwell on all of the elements of the mystery novel's appeal, but I do want to emphasize its versatility. Because of rather than despite its minimalism, the story spine I mentioned above—a crime and an attempt at solution or resolution—is endlessly malleable. A scan of mystery sub-genres offers a sense of that variety: cozy, caper, comic, thriller, psychological, police procedural, romantic suspense, noir/"hard boiled," amateur sleuth, private investigator, regional, historical, futuristic, literary, and myriad combinations and variations thereof. So too does a look at mystery sleuths—a staggeringly diverse array of adults, children, angels, vampires, androids, cats, dogs and individuals already dead by the time the story starts—and settings that range from a realistic ancient

Greece to a mean-streets Manhattan. Mystery novels are much like human beings, built on the same skeleton but endlessly varied in the flesh. Wildly different as they may seem at first glance, underneath their bones are essentially the same.

Stories of Inspiration: Mystery Fiction Edition celebrates the innovation and color of the mystery genre by inviting very different writers in the field to talk about the seeds and sources of their novels: what caught their attention, why it mattered, and how they transformed it to make a satisfying story.

These authors' reflections are as varied as their books. The boredom of sitting in the hair salon, a violent incident in a Chinese temple, a strange phrase that lingered in the mind, an ages-old newspaper's mention of a forgotten crime, an editor's welcome or not-too-welcome suggestion: these are just some of the "seeds" and starting points their essays discuss. The differences continue as they talk about how that tiny seed became a story or a novel or a series.

In conceiving this collection, I hoped to produce a lively look at the way the imagination works in the enterprise that is crime, mystery and suspense fiction. But to my delight, something else emerged as well. An inspiring place or author. A cherished pastime or career. A transformative personal quality. The magic that can be found in forgotten moments of history: as the authors collected here muse on the subjects and sources of their writing, they are also writing about what they value, even venerate. In their essays as well as their novels, that which is entertaining and that which is essential meet.

I hope you'll feel, as I do, that reading their essays enriches your sense of each authors' work, as well as the personality behind the pages. I also hope these brief pieces will illuminate for you, as they

do for me, the wonderful surprises of the creative process—the twists and turns, blind alleys and buried treasure that shape the imagination's journey.

And perhaps, just perhaps, they will even make you think about the nature of human communication, human community, itself. For in the end, these are perhaps the most compelling mysteries of all, puzzles not even the most brilliant detective will ever entirely master: why humans write stories, why humans read stories, and how the writing and reading of stories connects us so powerfully across continents, across cultures, and across time.

Suzanne Fox
Vero Beach, Florida
September 2016

Editorial Note

Like other *Stories of You* books, this anthology was conceived to celebrate the diversity of individual voices. While we have made proofreading and copy-editing alterations in preparing this book for print, we have chosen not to override our authors' personal choices on issues of style. We have, however, changed British spelling and usage to American style norms to allow for a reasonably consistent reading experience from one essay to the next. No disrespect whatsoever is intended to our friends across the (proverbial) pond, or to their glorious "English English," in making these changes.

The limitations of time, the vagaries of author availability, and above all the huge size and variety of the mystery marketplace mean that this—indeed, perhaps, any—anthology represents only a small sampling of mystery genres, book themes and situations, author demographics, and so on. Outreach for Volume 2 of *Stories of Inspiration: Mystery Fiction Edition* begins as this book appears, and we look forward to showcasing more of the range of mystery fiction as that and later volumes appear.

DIANA BRETHERICK

The Lombroso and Murray Mysteries

I have always been interested in the darker side of life. As a child I would steal my mother's true-crime library books and immerse myself in tales of murder and mutilation in the company of Dr. Crippen and Jack the Ripper. You could say then that my career choices—criminal lawyer, academic criminologist and finally crime writer—came as no surprise. At the heart of my fascination with all things criminal was the desire to know why people did such evil things. What could possibly bring someone from the benign *before* to the lethal *after*? Studying criminology produced few conclusive answers, but it did inspire my first novel.

Criminological theory is usually looked on by students as "the dull stuff" we have to get through before we get to the serial killers. One rainy day in a seminar, my students and I were discussing the first criminologist, a 19th-century Italian called Cesare Lombroso. He lived in the city of Turin and his experiments on criminals, both dead and alive, led him to conclude that not only were offenders

born rather than made but also you could tell who they were by looking at their physical characteristics. One of the students asked whether or not Lombroso had used his rather wacky ideas to solve crimes. I think I may have said something suitably withering like "Let's stick to the point, shall we?" and given him one of my severe looks. It was only later that I realized I should have given him a hug instead. He had ignited the spark that led to my first novel.

Inspired, I did some digging. No, there was no evidence that Lombroso investigated crimes, but he did appear in court and gave "expert" evidence about people's guilt based on the size of their noses or ears, the abundance or otherwise of their facial hair and other characteristics. I read his work and found his personality shone through like a beacon—kind, maddening, obsessive and occasionally unintentionally hilarious.

After that, I felt that had to write about him.

It was as if he had infected me with his own almost boundless enthusiasm. As I read more of Lombroso's work, I found a mention of a serial killer called Eusebius Peydagnelle who mutilated his victims. That in turn inspired the fictional crimes and killer that inhabited *City of Devils*. I didn't want Lombroso to be my central detective. This was mainly because in real life, he would be a terrible investigator—constantly convinced of his own rightness even though his theories would inevitably mean that he was wrong. I decided to bring in another character: younger (Lombroso was 52 in 1887 when my story is set), more energetic and a stranger to this new world, just as the reader would be. This is how young Scottish doctor James Murray, the hero of my novels, was born.

He is loosely based on Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, famous of course for creating Sherlock Holmes (only a few hundred yards from where I live). Perhaps it's something in the Southsea air. I certainly hope so. In my series, James arrives in Turin from Edinburgh to work with Lombroso, although he has another, darker reason for being there, too. He takes the reader through his own discovery of the world of early criminology, or criminal anthropology as it was then known. He falls in love and helps Lombroso to solve the crimes by using more orthodox methods, such as logical deduction and detection as well as some early forensics.

At the heart of the story is this early forensic study, or scientific policing, as it was called then. I wanted to get this absolutely right, so after doing my own reading I asked one of my colleagues to check the manuscript to ensure that the details were correct. Obviously, a university criminology department was exactly the right place to be. My fellow criminologists were extremely helpful even when I asked them odd questions such as "What does death smell like?" or "How easy is to cut off someone's nose?" as they were valiantly trying to eat their lunch.

My research then took me to Turin itself. There I discovered Lombroso's crime museum, a real-life place containing the extraordinary exhibits that he collected over the years: skulls, death masks, bits of tattooed skin from criminals as well as their own artistic efforts on pieces of pottery and the like. It's open to the public and I recommend a visit.

As if that were not inspiration enough, the city itself, I learned, has a reputation for black magic and Satanism stretching back over

centuries. The gates to hell are apparently located there, next to a rather bizarre-looking statue of an angel, reputed to be Lucifer, looking down on a plinth of writhing bodies. Naturally that statue is on the novel's cover and is the location of the first murder. I also made the tremendous personal sacrifice of visiting a number of the city's restaurants and bars. Well, you have to get the food and drink right, don't you? It's a vital part of conjuring up a sense of place. I picked up a copy of a 19th-century cookery book from Piedmont in a farmer's market there, so all the dishes and wines in the novel are authentic.

City of Devils is the first in a series. I knew this from the beginning, so I created the characters with a view to their developing over a broader narrative arc. In particular, James becomes more certain of himself as his relationship with Lombroso deepens. He starts as the young apprentice, but becomes more than an assistant as the novels progress.

The second book in the series, *The Devil's Daughters*, has as its theme women and crime. Lombroso was the first criminologist to write on this subject. As you might imagine, his ideas were troubling from a feminist's point of view. According to him, women are generally inferior, poorly evolved and often no more than big children. Which sounds to me more like a description of many politicians—but there we are. Violent female offenders, he maintained, were often more ruthless than their male counterparts. I have written plenty of strong and intelligent women into the book to provide an answer to these views and to solve the crimes, with James Murray to assist.

So far I have found Lombroso to be an entertaining companion in my writing, although he is also sometimes infuriating. I love writing

about him and his world and following James through his adventures in crime solving, too. I have started thinking about the third in the series, having recently discovered an interview with Lombroso in an old American newspaper where he provides a profile of Jack the Ripper. What writer could resist that?

DIANA BRETHERICK is no stranger to crime. She worked as a criminal lawyer for ten years and then was a therapist with offenders at Brixton prison, London. She lectures in criminology and criminal justice at the University of Portsmouth and writes about crime in both fact and fiction. The first in her series of historical mysteries featuring the world's first criminologist, Cesare Lombroso, *The City of Devils*, was published in 2013 by Pegasus Books. Her second, *The Devil's Daughters*, is out in the UK now. Visit Diana at her website, www.dianabretherick.co.uk.

FRANCES BRODY

The Kate Shackleton Mysteries

I write the Kate Shackleton murder mystery series, set in 1920s Yorkshire in the north of England. Yorkshire is the largest county in the United Kingdom. Its towns and cities were at the forefront of the Industrial Revolution. There was a great deal of money to be made here, alongside harsh working conditions and devastating poverty. Times change. The smog and grime of the earlier part of the last century have given way to smart city centers. The so-called slums of my childhood have been demolished. I say "so-called" because I remember with affection one in particular of those back-to-back houses with a shared privy in the yard. It was cozy. I was happy there.

Much of the surrounding countryside, still home to sheep farmers, is now part of the National Parks, designated as an area of outstanding natural beauty. I walk in the Yorkshire Dales as often as I can. There are places that have not changed in millennia. In the UK we are never more than 80 miles from the sea and I love to visit the

coast. As I write, the copy edit of the latest Kate Shackleton novel is on the way to the printer. It's set in Whitby, the port where Bram Stoker landed Dracula in the form of a black dog.

My inspiration comes from these town and country landscapes and from the hardy and resilient people who live and have lived here. Their stories are my inspiration.

Why the 1920s? That period after the Great War of 1914-1918 was a time of huge upheaval. In particular it was a time of change for women. In the north of England, women had always worked, in mines, factories and mills.

There is a tradition of strong, determined women. After the slaughter of that war, many faced life without male support and re-made their lives. I am fortunate in having known some of them.

My detective, Kate Shackleton, is a war widow, reluctant to believe her husband will never return but determined to carry on with her life. She turns her talents to investigating, inquiring into matters that might otherwise remain a mystery.

When I am about to begin a new novel, often there is very little for me to go on. I begin with a new A4 notebook and a few ideas—images, thoughts. Fortunately, I have my "infrastructure."

At the beginning of the series, I chose Kate's house and car and found her a housekeeper. She has an adoptive father who is a police superintendent and an aristocratic mother who married down for love. Kate has an assistant, a retired policeman, Jim Sykes. She is financially independent, which allows her to go anywhere at short notice. Her housekeeper, Mrs. Sugden, is there to hold the fort.

The village of Langcliffe, North Yorkshire, in 1926, provides the setting for *A Death in the Dales*, seventh in the Kate Shackleton

Mystery Series. Kate, on holiday with niece Harriet, does not intend to take on an investigation but, as so often happens, life throws up surprises.

Before I thought in detail about the story, I knew that Langcliffe would be the setting. I've walked around that area many times and it had the right feeling—the feeling of a place where plots might twist and turn like a country road, a place where there would be whispers on the wind.

I originally thought the story would center on the area's caves and a missing boy. The limestone that composes the cliff above the village was deposited 350,000,000 years ago. Victoria Cave was the den of the straight-tusked elephant, narrow-nosed rhinoceros, giant deer, red deer, oxen, bear, hippopotamus, and the hyena that ate them. I ventured, not very far, into a cave where my lost boy might have sought shelter.

One other strand formed part of the mystery but there was a big gap in the story. I hadn't yet found the central plot thread.

As a millennium project, the villagers of Langcliffe had researched the history of their locality and produced two small but perfect books. A story in one of these books that I followed up in the local newspaper provided my missing link.

In fiction, serious crimes have serious motives. The unraveling of the crime presents a challenge to detective and reader. So it is in *A Death in the Dales*. There is a murder, a witness who is not believed, and a miscarriage of justice.

The real-life story that helped me turn *A Death in the Dales* into well-crafted, compelling murder mystery arose from a tragic incident: a case of manslaughter at an alehouse.

The alehouse was patronized by men who were working on the construction of the Settle-Carlisle railway. On a night in January 1871, the 75-year old innkeeper, who had lost his right arm, called closing time. Two men refused to leave, bolting the door. They demanded a gallon of ale from the innkeeper's wife. She gave them sixpence to persuade them to go. A granddaughter ran for help. Unfortunately, there was no constable, as he had recently been moved to another post. When the innkeeper tried to open his own door, he was kicked and punched. He died of his injuries. At the West Riding Assizes, the judge said that if the killer had used weapons, he would have been guilty of murder. He was convicted of manslaughter and sentenced to penal servitude.

In *A Death in the Dales*, I draw on that real-life story, imagining a murder taking place in the village ten years before Kate Shackleton arrives on the scene. She has reason to believe that the wrong man was convicted and paid the ultimate penalty, and that the killer is still at large. In my story, the murder was witnessed by a woman who died several months earlier and who had hoped that Kate would look into this crime.

Investigating this case created something new for Kate: the 1920s equivalent of a cold case, a case the villagers of Langcliffe would prefer to forget.

Is it callous to regard a case of manslaughter as a touch of novelistic serendipity? Probably. But here's a nasty little secret: that's what crime writers do.

FRANCES BRODY has written eight mysteries set in the 1920s, featuring elegant and intrepid Kate Shackleton, World War I widow-turned-sleuth. *Murder in the Afternoon* was named a Library Journal best book. Frances, a 2016 Mary Higgins Clark finalist for *A Woman Unknown*, began her writing career in BBC radio and television. She is the author of three sagas. The first saga, based on her mother's stories, won the HarperCollins Elizabeth Elgin award. Frances lives in Yorkshire, England, the setting for her novels. Find her at www.frances-brody.com.

ELIZABETH BRUNDAGE

All Things Cease to Appear

This book started with a house. It was the late 90's and my husband had just joined a medical practice in Troy, New York. For Mother's Day the year before, he took me to a beautiful inn in Columbia County—the Old Chatham Sheepherding Company—and over the course of that weekend I decided that Old Chatham, New York was one of the most beautiful places on earth and I wanted to live there. We decided to rent a house in nearby Malden Bridge, a historic hamlet that had been settled in the late 18th century. One afternoon, with my girls in the car (our son was just a twinkle in my eye back then) we drove past this old house with a For Rent sign hanging from a tree. It was a lovely white clapboard cape with a small front porch. I pulled over and we got out. There was nobody around; the place looked empty. We roamed around to the back yard, smelling sage and wild onion, and discovered a Dutch door. On impulse I tried the knob, but of course the door

was locked. And then the strangest thing happened. The bottom half of the door eased open all on its own.

It felt like an invitation. We crawled inside on our hands and knees and the girls, who were 3 and 6 at the time, started running wildly through the house as children often do, filling the empty rooms with shrieks and laughter. I was struck by the simple grace of the house, the wide boards, the wavy original glass windows. I couldn't believe the place was empty. We ended up signing a lease and moving in. Shortly thereafter, we discovered that we were not alone. Every morning on the way to school the girls told me stories about the ghosts, three little girls who had died in a fire and whose mother and father were up in heaven. They knew details that seemed beyond their ability to fabricate, including the names of the ghosts and historic details about an old mill down the road with tainted water. One night, my youngest was literally laughing at something that seemed to be moving around the room. She pointed at it, giggling. I couldn't see it. But I could feel it. I just knew. Months later, when we were moving out, I rushed through the empty house to make sure we hadn't forgotten anything. I opened a cabinet in the built-in corner cupboard of the dining room—for some reason I had never opened it before—and discovered three pairs of children's shoes: little brown leather boots, probably stitched together in the early 1800's, that would perfectly fit those little girl ghosts, matching the ages that my daughters had described. I couldn't help it; I took them with me. It just didn't seem right to leave them there all alone.

We all wonder about death and the mysterious unknown that follows. I knew I wanted to write about the subject and to somehow incorporate a ghost into my story. And then George Clare walked

into the cold attic of my brain. He told me he was an art historian with some very deep and troubling secrets. I knew I wanted to set the novel in the Hudson River Valley and I had always loved the painter George Inness, one of the great Hudson River School painters. When I started researching Inness's life, I discovered that he was a devout Swedenborgian. That led me to Emanuel Swedenborg, an 18th-century Swedish philosopher and mystic who believed in the existence of heaven and hell and that, after death, we experience a rich and complex afterlife. This information provided a fascinating subtext and opened up the larger world of the novel, allowing me to pull together the disparate strands of ideas in my head—a horrible, unsolved murder, the ghost of an unresolved woman, three brothers who grow up without her, and a once-thriving agricultural community in the throes of urban gentrification.

Building a book is something like building a house. You begin with the land, the type of soil and its history, the landscape. You pour your foundation and construct the frame that will support the floors overhead. In this novel, the foundation is made of the bones of a dead woman, a woman I had read about in a newspaper once, whose murder has never been solved. That dark history cannot be contained in the muddy cellar. It rises up through the old wood boards, seeping out through the cracks, filling the empty rooms. It shouts its terrible story in the faintest whisper.

Dear writer, it says, I beg you: listen carefully. I have a story to tell.

~

ELIZABETH BRUNDAGE graduated from Hampshire College, attended NYU film school, was a screenwriting fellow at the

American Film Institute in Los Angeles, and received an M.F.A. as well as a James Michener Award from the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop. She has taught at a variety of colleges and universities, most recently at Skidmore College, where she was visiting writer-in-residence. *All Things Cease to Appear* is her fourth novel. She lives near Albany in upstate New York. Find her at www.elizabethbrundage.com.

ELIZABETH BUHMANN

Lay Death at Her Door

For me, a mystery is first conceived as a feeling, a complex emotion that will be generated by the final revelation of who murdered whom and why. The moment of truth should stir up a mixture of surprise, consternation, horror and disgust or pity and terror, a chill of recognition perhaps, and maybe also a satisfying reassurance of order restored, wrong righted.

Every mystery contains two stories. One is a hidden drama that culminates in murder. The other is a process of discovery and exposure. The plot the reader follows is the latter. At its climax, the truth tumbles out in a rush, full-blown. One final fact or insight, admission or connection, sweeps aside all confusion and deception. The narrator or detective then swiftly arranges the full picture of the hidden drama, and the two stories become one.

The feeling that accompanies the sudden recognition of hidden truth is unique to the characters and central crime of the mystery. The more fully developed the characters and the act of murder, the

more intense the reader's reaction will be. My first task in creating a mystery, therefore, is to richly envision the hidden drama—who kills whom, when, where, how, and above all *why*.

When I wrote *Lay Death at Her Door*, I knew that I wanted an old murder. To me, part of the satisfaction of the mystery genre lies in rooting out injustice and setting it right. The more long-standing and deeply hidden the crime, the better the pay-off when the wrong is exposed. So I wanted a crime with a long shadow.

In the early 2000s, when I was still working at the Texas Attorney General's Office, the Innocence Project began to make headlines by testing old DNA evidence, often from rape kits, to exonerate those convicted of crimes they didn't commit. Often these men had served a decade or more. I started from the idea of a crime that comes unsolved when the man convicted of it is proven innocent twenty years after the fact.

Wrongful convictions are most often the result of false eyewitness testimony, prosecutorial misconduct, or both. The miscarriage of justice, for me, was not the central issue, however. I wanted to get at the original crime that escaped notice when the wrong man was arrested. I had the idea that the man's accuser could have lied on the stand. In my novel, Kate Cranbrook, rape victim and witness to murder, knew who the real killer was and lied to protect herself. My plan was to follow her to the heart of the mystery.

Conjuring a murder is the work of a crime writer (and I do love a good crime novel). But a good mystery packs an additional wallop because the reader's full comprehension of the crime is compressed into a moment of revelation near the end and heightened by the

element of surprise. It is as if the reader knows both the killer and the victim, opens a door on the act, and gasps.

The act of murder is followed by the hiding of it. The surface must be smoothed in preparation for the story of discovery. The quest begins with an eruption of the hidden violence: a body, a missing person, blood. This is the germ of the plot, the hunt, the delectable following of clues and ferreting out of truth.

The great challenge for a mystery author is to simultaneously reveal and conceal. Reveal the character of the murderer while concealing the act. Reveal the where, when, how, and why of the murder while concealing the actor.

The tricks of this trade are numerous, but they mostly come down to preventing connections. The author provides all the pieces of the hidden story without triggering a connection between them in the reader's mind. Narrative momentum in the plot of a mystery is increasingly important as more and more of the elements of the hidden drama are laid out in full view. Imagine rounding up a cluster of magnets, keeping them apart until at a nudge they can all fly together at once.

The pay-off of the revelation is an intellectual thrill. If the murderer, the victim, and the act itself have all been fully developed, there will be a gut reaction as well to the scene beyond the open door. That emotion, for me, is an aesthetic pleasure that only a well-told murder mystery can provide.

Most often, the work of preventing connections is accomplished through a detective. Detectives are the baying hounds we follow on the hunt, leading us past key information at a dead run. I think of

detectives as the ultimate unreliable narrators. They continually spin plausible, but false, theories to direct our attention to the wrong information and a bogus explanation of the murder.

In my book, *Lay Death at Her Door*, the only detectives are incidental characters. I love detectives, but I wanted to get closer to the act of murder. My protagonist didn't commit the 1986 crime that provides the central mystery of the book, but she alone understands every facet of the hidden drama. Without her, the murder would not have taken place.

She also drives the discovery of the crime. Without her, the truth could have remained buried in the past, but her character compels her on a course of action that ends in full exposure. As she sheds twenty years' worth of crippling deceptions, she slowly, and then in a rush completely, lays bare the dark heart of a murder.

ELIZABETH BUHMANN is originally from Virginia, where her first novel, *Lay Death at Her Door,* is set; like her main character, she lived abroad several years while growing up. She graduated *magna cum laude* from Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts, and has a PhD in Philosophy from the University of Pittsburgh. For twenty years she worked for the Texas Attorney General as a researcher and writer on criminal justice and crime victim issues. Elizabeth now lives in Austin, Texas, with her husband and dog. She is an avid gardener, loves murder mysteries, and is a long-time student of Taiji Quan. Find her online at www.elizabethbuhmann.com.

NANCY J. COHEN

The Bad Hair Day Mysteries

My agent suggested I write a straight mystery series since I'd been putting mystery elements into my sci-fi romances. I liked the idea but wanted a heroine with an occupation that hadn't been done before.

One day I was sitting in the hair salon getting a perm, waiting for the timer to go off. I looked at all the other ladies staring into space and thought: *We need something gripping to read to kill time. Let's kill off one of these ladies.* That's where the idea was born for *Permed to Death*, Book 1 in the Bad Hair Day mystery series.

The more I thought about creating a hairstylist sleuth, the better I liked the idea. A hairdresser has to be a good conversationalist and a good listener. These are skills very useful for a sleuth. Conversations in a salon flow freely, and clients confide in stylists all the time. So my hairstylist-sleuth could hear, and overhear, things someone else might never learn. Plus, a hairstylist is mobile in some respects. She

can do a bridal party in a hotel, for example. She doesn't have to be confined to the salon, and that's a plus for an amateur sleuth.

I have absolutely no hairstyling talent whatsoever. When it comes to doing my own hair, I'm even afraid to use a curling iron for fear of burning myself. So there was definitely a learning curve at the start of the Bad Hair Day series. My hairstylist at the time owned her own salon, so she was my role model. I watched her mix solutions while I asked numerous questions, checked out the cosmetology curriculum at a local vocational school, went to a beauty trade show in Orlando, and subscribed to *Modern Salon* magazine. All of this research made my stories sound authentic regarding a hairstylist's life and lingo.

I decided that Marla the hairdresser was also a salon owner. She was 34 at the start of the series, divorced, and didn't want children. I also decided that her client was going to die in the middle of getting a perm, which gave me my first victim. But what would give Marla the personal motivation to want to get involved? For the answer to that, I drew on my earlier background in nursing. As a registered nurse, I had seen a continuing education film on near drowning. Drowning is the number-one cause of death for children ages four and under in South Florida. What if Marla had been involved in that kind of tragic accident?

This led to Marla's backstory. As a teenager, she'd been babysitting a toddler who drowned in the backyard pool. Marla couldn't help that child, but now she can do something for the client who expired in her salon by solving the woman's murder. This need to restore her self-respect carries through the initial books in the series.

Marla's Cut 'N Dye Salon is located in fictional Palm Haven, an affluent suburb west of Fort Lauderdale. Palm Haven is inspired by my own hometown, so I have the benefit of local knowledge and settings. We have a diverse population in South Florida, which plays into my stories. Marla goes to interview suspects at different locations throughout the state. This allows me to showcase our varied regions. And if I'm looking for crimes or motives for criminals, all I need to do is read the newspaper—there's plenty in our daily news to inspire me.

To fuel my plots and situations, I keep a clippings file. What I tuck away there doesn't have to be anything crime-related. It could be a science article, some weird story, or a topic I'd like to research. And I give Marla some of my own experiences—not the murders, thankfully, but other events. In *Peril by Ponytail*, for example, Marla and Dalton go on a honeymoon to an Arizona dude ranch. I have a cousin in Arizona who invited us to stay with her. I used the trip to satisfy my curiosity about dude ranches, copper mines, ghost towns, and more. Many of these experiences ended up in the novel, where someone is sabotaging the ranch owned by Dalton's uncle.

My husband and I are frequent visitors to Disney World, where I got interested in hydroponic gardening and fish tanks at The Land pavilion in Epcot. This led me to an aquaculture research center in Davie, Florida, to learn about tilapia breeding, and I wove that info into *Body Wave*. So you just never know what will spark off an idea.

I like to learn something new with each story, too. My books have touched on the pet fur trade, exotic bird smuggling, sugar plantations, pirate treasure, and Native American burial sites, among other topics.

These issues are important to Floridians, and I like to think my readers can relate to them as well.

I didn't imagine myself writing so many books in the series, but I always planned to have Marla grow and change over the years. In reading books that I enjoy myself, the series that really get me hooked always have an evolving central character. That was true even in my early reading. The Judy Bolton detective series and the Horatio Hornblower books made an impression on me when I was younger. Both series follow a protagonist who continues to evolve as the series progresses. Readers may expect to get a mystery in each Bad Hair Day story, but what keeps them coming back is getting to know and love the characters. Fans can follow Marla's life and see how her perspective changes over time.

I couldn't have foreseen all the ways she would change. For example, her relationship to Brianna—Detective Dalton Vail's daughter—starts out with antagonism. They end up being quite close after Marla marries the teen's dad and accepts Brianna as her stepdaughter. Marla has to deal with the girl learning to drive and looking at boys—and at one point, Marla actually has to give Brianna the dreaded "talk." This is one of the situations that challenges Marla to grow. Expected or not, I'm very pleased with how Marla has turned out!

A final element of the series, its humorous voice, didn't come from any external inspiration. There is some humor in my romance novels, but Marla's particular "take" is more distinctly like my own. I might plot out an incident, but I don't have to labor the voice. For example, in *Murder by Manicure,* Marla pretends to be a friend's fiancée to protect him from an old schoolmate who has a crush on him. I really

enjoyed writing these scenes, and I hope readers will have fun with them, too. I'm also a fan of happy endings. We hear enough bad news and sad stories out there. I want readers to close my books with a smile on their face.

NANCY J. COHEN writes the humorous Bad Hair Day Mysteries featuring hairstylist Marla Shore. Titles in this series have made the IMBA bestseller list and been selected by *Suspense Magazine* as best cozy mystery. The author of over 20 published novels, Nancy has also written *Writing the Cozy Mystery*, a valuable instructional guide on how to write a winning whodunit. A featured speaker at libraries, conferences, and community events, she is listed in *Contemporary Authors, Poets & Writers*, and *Who's Who in U.S. Writers, Editors, & Poets*. Follow her on Facebook, Twitter and other social media, and find out more on her website, www.nancyjcohen.com.

SUZANNE FOX

Harper's Moon

A woman; a journey; a house. From that triad all of my fiction springs. The woman is always the heart of the story, hence her primary place in the list; the journey is central, the story's driving motion and change. But it's the house that comes first to my mind or, more accurately, to my eye. The homes my female protagonists journey to and from are always inspired by real places, and always by houses I glimpse briefly rather than ones I know well.

The book that became *Harper's Moon*, one of two genre novels I wrote under pseudonyms in the late 1990s, began with a house perched on a Western North Carolina hillside. Small and obviously old, distant from its nearest neighbor, it was dwarfed by the sky and mountains beyond. Fieldstone walls, a modest front porch, little windows trimmed with paint that had weathered to gray: the house was unremarkable, really, in a region whose dwellings ran the gamut

from the remarkably grandiose Biltmore Estate to some remarkably derelict doublewides.

I noticed it in the distance, and I drove on by.

Yet it called to my imagination, and when I ignored it, called again.

I was staying with my mother and father in a vacation house they had rented outside of Burnsville, a small town about 35 miles from Asheville. This was my first visit to the Smoky Mountains, a region I've loved ever since and one rich with unforgettable sights. Despite the tough competition for my attention, the fieldstone house refused to recede into the back of my mind. One morning I asked my mom, who never failed to support even my weirdest creative imperatives, to drive with me to see it again. We made our way around Burnsville's town square and out into the surrounding country, past tobacco fields, rental properties, and stands of fir and pine. Several miles of county road later there the house was again, just as ordinary as it had seemed the last time, but just as compelling too.

This time, I knew why it had stayed in my mind: its air of pride, of self-sufficiency, even of defiance.

Look at me, it seemed to say.

I am small.

I am alone.

I am vulnerable, to humans and nature and time.

I might look unimpressive, even dull.

But I endure. I stand. I survive.

As Mom and I drove back toward town I wasn't conscious of wondering what kind of woman might choose to live in that house, to seek refuge in this place where loneliness and endurance met. I was only aware that in my imagination she had arrived to take up

residence there, a tall woman with a bruised soul and a battered, unassuming strength.

I drove by the house several more times before I left the mountains. With my mother and father, I talked about whether to ride down the untidy gravel drive, take a closer look at the place, even knock at the door. But both times I stopped at the rutted meeting of road and drive I could go no further. I had unknowingly pledged allegiance to *my* woman, *my* house, *my* fictional journey. If there was a time when their counterparts in the real world had been able to help me, it seemed, that moment had already passed.

Almost all of what became *Harper's Moon* grew out of that house and the fictional tensions it suggested. Annie Taylor, as the tall woman's name turned out to be; Manhattan and Burnsville, the diametrically different places—and possibilities—she moves between; her neighbor Jed Harper and her husband Tom, who represent, among other things, the light and shadow sides of trust; the 120-plus named characters who populate my fictional world…in one way or another, the little fieldstone house inspired them all. Even more profoundly, the house and its setting gave me the book's mood, its atmosphere—an element of fiction that's crucially important to me as I write, and as I read as well.

From the start I'd seen this book as romantic suspense: the romance because I was a struggling freelancer and that was the only kind of fiction I had sold before, the suspense because the setting seemed to cry out for it. But I had no illusions about my ability to handle true mystery plotting, the intricacy of which has always defeated me. In Annie's violent husband Tom, from whom she flees almost a thousand miles and who seeks to track her down, I had one

manageable element of suspense built in. The enigmatic quality of the Smokies suggested another, a Wiccan coven with one rogue member. More useful tensions, this time between day and night, openness and secrecy, healing power and destructive force. Satisfied with that and my other storylines, I drafted nine or ten chapters, polished up three of them, wrote a synopsis, and submitted a proposal to my agent.

She told me fairly soon that the book was being considered by an editor at Berkley Books. There it sat, stalled during Berkley's acquisition by Penguin Putnam. I moved on to other projects with likelier paychecks. The seasons and then the year changed before I heard back.

A book sale is always to be celebrated. The acquiring editor, Gail Fortune, was lovely, and her support for the way the novel was as much mainstream fiction as genre writing was, too. But she wanted the book in six months or so, a short time for a slow writer like me. The story had gone cold since I'd put it away, and I had an added worry. At that time, Berkley had a fiction line dedicated to the occult or the paranormal or both—I don't remember the details. If a book wasn't appearing under that particular imprint, witches (even beneficent ones) were off limits. Farewell to my Wiccan coven; hello to a gaping hole in my fictional structure, right in the spot that was the most difficult to repair.

To my relief, Annie's journey came back to life promptly once I began to write the book again. The suspense plotting was harder to revive. Once again I was saved by that little house. Imagining myself there, it struck me that if I were Annie Taylor, alone at night with nothing but aching memories to keep me company, it wouldn't take

a major crime to scare me witless. Something that was merely strange and senseless might be as scary as a direct assault, especially because the culprit would have to be either a violent husband playing mind games or an unhinged stranger with an inexplicable animus. I'm not quite sure how those insights became a plotline about a harridan venting a lifetime's disappointment by pitching raw offal onto the porch of a stranger's home. Some journeys through my subconscious feel wiser not to map.

I didn't want to give Annie some convenient cache of wealth with which to fund her escape from Tom. She had to have a way of earning a living without giving her location away, and I had to give her real work to do. In the textile art of my friends Betsy Chabot and Beth Mount and an embroidered crazy quilt I'd inherited from a family friend, I found the inspiration to make Annie an art quilter. (The last part of the pen name I used for the book, Suzanne Judson, comes from Betsy's street address, a small act of homage.) As a textile artist, Annie could sell her work through galleries far afield using the mail and a post office box—this was the late 90s, before broadband and inexpensive websites and Etsy. Fabric aplenty could be found for almost nothing at any thrift shop, and looking for it would drive her out of her sanctuary into the community.

Nothing more than a plot fix at first, her creativity soon stitched itself into the heart of the story. I designed her textile artworks fully in my mind, using each to emphasize a single moment in the story's mood, movement and imagery. Pieced together out of the disparate, the damaged and the discarded, Annie's unconventional quilts became symbols of women's resourcefulness, the unexpected joining that is love, the warm patchwork of community. In one chapter of the novel

after the other, the little stone house had gradually been cleaned, lived in, threatened, loved. Now motley strips of newly-washed cotton swung from the clothesline out back and a length of bright pieced cloth hung airing over the front porch rail.

As I finished the manuscript, I realized that I always find myself writing not only about a woman and a journey and a house, but also about the act of making things. As Annie creates beauty from her reclaimed scraps and threads, she literally and figuratively fashions a new identity. Not a bad correlative for the novel itself: an assemblage of disparate pieces from my own life and imagination—a briefly glimpsed house, some memories of Manhattan, a friend's chosen art form, the mood of the mountains—being joined into a new and hopefully sturdy fabric.

In the novel, Annie's journey toward the little stone house comes full circle as she grows strong enough both to claim and to consider leaving it. In finishing *Harper's Moon*, I too felt satisfaction mingled with a sense that something new, something larger, was emerging. I began to see that it was time to stop writing genre fiction, to give up the safety its constraints had offered me, to take up creative residence in a new place.

But that was in the future. Like all journeys, this one would take time and patience. For the moment, all I had to do was wait for a glimpse of the next inspirational house.

Author, book consultant and publisher **SUZANNE FOX** is the creative director of Stories of You Books and the founder/editor of the online journal *Society Nineteen*, which interviews

contemporary authors writing about 19th-century experience. Her books include the memoir *Home Life: A Journey of Rooms and Recollections,* which was published by Simon and Schuster and selected as an Editor's Choice by the *Chicago Tribune*, and women's fiction that has been published under two different pseudonyms and translated into seven languages. The editor of the Stories of You anthologies and a frequent teacher and speaker on writing, stories and creativity, Suzanne lives in Florida and is currently working on a novel set in 19th-century Britain. Find out more at www.storiesofyou.org and www.bookstrategy.com.

CHRIS GOFF

Dark Waters

In September of 1999, I found myself somewhere I never imagined I would be—standing in a square in Tel Aviv, Israel, watching the bomb squad detonate a bag that had been abandoned in the street. Held at bay by a hastily erected metal fence, we jostled with a myriad of other onlookers for viewing position. It was only after the bag was blown to bits and pieces of diaper rained down on our heads that it occurred to me: had it been a real bomb, the cotton fluff would have been shrapnel.

That fall I was spending two months in Israel with my second-to-youngest daughter. She was eleven and had been diagnosed with leukopenia, a disease that caused her white blood cell count to hover dangerously low. After exhausting treatment options in the U.S., we'd been connected to a doctor in Tel Aviv with unorthodox methods—an alternative to sitting at home and waiting for the inevitable bone marrow transplant, a chance for her to be healthy again.

It was during this time that I came up with the idea for my thriller, *Dark Waters*.

To occupy the free time between doctor's appointments, my daughter and I walked the streets of Tel Aviv. On the weekends we would rent a car and drive places, including Bethlehem, the Golan Heights, Haifa, and the resort town of Tiberias, which sits beside the Sea of Galilee. We'd arrived in Israel at a time when suicide bombings and tensions were increasing. Throughout the course of our stay it became clear that the divisions ran deep, and the divides were not just Israeli versus Arab but included factions of Jews against Jews. It was a place of clashing cultures, deep convictions, unending beauty and constant danger. It was a place where every day you lived on the edge.

I took hundreds of pictures while I was there, and filled notebooks with impressions of the people we met and the places we saw. Over the course of two months, my daughter's health improved and at last we came home. It was then *Dark Waters* was shoved to the back burner.

In 1998, I had signed a three-book contract with Berkley Prime Crime for my cozy Birdwatcher's Mystery series. I had delivered the first book, *A Rant of Ravens*, but I had a second book due, then a third. And, when first book hit some bestseller lists and was nominated for an award, I signed a contract for two more in the series. Then in 2002, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. Suffice it to say, the treatment interfered with my deadlines and derailed my writing career. I missed a few deadlines, lost the momentum and, after *Death Shoots a Birdie* was published in March 2007, I found myself out of contract.

It was the best thing that ever happened to me. For the first time in years, I was able to think about the direction I wanted to take as a writer. While I had enjoyed writing the Birdwatcher's Mystery series, thrillers are my favorite crime-book genre. As a teenager, I had discovered Helen MacInnes, and my recreational reading has always leaned toward spy fiction: Ian Fleming, John Le Carré, Alistair MacLean, Jack Higgins, Frederick Forsyth, Ken Follett, Robert Ludlum, Tom Clancy. The list goes on. Without a contract and no limits on time, I was free to explore my dark side, and *Dark Waters* was pulled to the front burner.

The interesting thing about being a writer is how your mind is always working. Even though I had paid little attention to the concept, stirring the pot only occasionally with a wistfulness that had to be quelled, ideas had germinated. I reveled in being able to indulge my fantasies and follow tangents. I spent time studying spycraft, delving into conspiracy theories, learning about guns and weaponry, and dissecting world politics.

It took me five years to finally piece together the story I wanted to tell. It contains some autobiographical elements—altered dramatically to fit the story. I cherish the fact I was able to approach the writing like it was a first novel, without the constraint of deadlines or expectations. It was the book of my heart, written five books into my career.

By the time I sent *Dark Waters* to my agent, I knew I had something special. But even the best book needs an editor. My agent served as my first reader. I made changes for him—twice. After another year, the book was finally ready to send out to publishers. Within several weeks, offers started coming in and we signed a

two-book contract with Crooked Lane Books. My excitement was barely contained. I had an editor, and he loved my book!

Then, three weeks later, I received a seven-page, single-spaced revision letter.

My first reaction was to wonder why he had bought the book if he hated it. My second was to take a good hard look at what he wanted me to do. A good editor is a writer's best friend and I had to concede that for the most part, he was right. Implementing his suggestions would make *Dark Waters* a better book.

It took me two months to deconstruct the book and reconstruct it. Many of the changes were issues in the chronological telling—something a writer not used to writing in multi-viewpoints can easily miss. Other changes were more intrinsic to the story, though all of the elements important to me remained. What mattered stayed.

The book finally came out in September 2015. To date, *Dark Waters* has received a lot of great accolades from critical reviewers, valued peers, and readers. It is the book I'm proudest of, one that sets the bar high. Stay tuned for the sequel.

CHRIS GOFF is the award-wining author of international thrillers and the Birdwatcher's Mystery series. Her debut thriller, *Dark Waters* (Crooked Lane Books, September 2015), set in Israel amid the Israel-Palestine conflict, has sold international rights and been released in audio by Blackstone Audio. The bestselling Birdwatcher's Mystery series, which she writes as Christine Goff, has been a finalist for two WILLA Literary Awards and a Colorado Author's League Award and has been published in

Japan. Astor + Blue Editions publishes her Birdwatcher backlist. Book #6, *A Parliament of Owls,* appeared in May 2016. Goff's second thriller, *Red Sky,* is set in Ukraine and is due out in 2017. Find out more at www.christinegoff.com.

STEVEN GORE

White City

The great crime novelist Ross MacDonald wrote about his protagonist, "I wasn't Archer, exactly, but Archer was me." So it is with Graham Gage, the protagonist of *White Ghost*. Not only do Gage and I share the same sense of the world and walk the same moral landscape, but he knows the rough ground of crime and the hard people who make it so only because I traveled there and learned it all before him. And he knows how to live in the shadow of death only because that shadow fell over me first.

As I approached my seventh novel, it seemed to me it was time to display at least some aspects of what that life is like. And not for my sake, but for others who live, have lived or will live, or who will die, in that shadow. And what I learned over the last 15 years of biopsies and chemotherapy, of examining rooms and hospitals, of radiology labs and infusion centers, is that contrary to the mythology of panic and terror, of collapse and paralysis that surrounds cancer, we carry on. Except for those who have been afflicted with forms

that are too disabling or who survive only weeks or months—we carry on:

Mothers mother. Fathers father. Workers work. Sellers sell. Writers write. Doctors doctor. Liars lie. Cheaters cheat. Predators prey.

We are who we are and do what we do.

Regardless of what our initial reaction to the diagnosis might have been—rage, fear, resignation, self-estrangement, or self-pity—it fades.

Regardless of the promises we might have made to ourselves—to be kind or generous or Zen-like in our equanimity—we return to whoever we've always been.

Regardless of the ways in which we might have viewed ourselves—as patients, victims, sufferers, warriors, or survivors—in the end we rediscover who we've always been.

Regardless of the ways we think the world has been changed and remade—brighter or dimmer, engaging or indifferent—in the end we find it is the same world and we are the same in it—

And we carry on.

All this should be obvious. And it certainly is, inside infusion rooms and radiation oncology departments and in all the other places where patients are diagnosed and treated. But outside, in fiction and in memoir, on talk shows and in films, and in the cottage industry of self-help and popular psychology, the mythology lives on. And *White Ghost* is partly an attempt to combat it.

The adversity Gage faces in the novel is more urgent than mine, a chronic and often treatable, but ultimately incurable form of lymphoma. The oncologist's original prognosis of my time from diagnosis through treatments to death turned out to be overly conservative

and I rode, am still riding, the prognostic bell curve, first traveling up and then down the sweeping arcs, and now along the thinning tail. Indeed, I worked for another nine years in scores of places around the globe before I reached the sort of moment in Gage's life when the story begins.

But by then I was transitioning from investigator to writer and whatever discomforts I underwent in treatment were compensated for by my undergoing them in the company of my wife and in the comfort of my home. My commute was no longer to my office downtown, but only to a converted bottom-floor bedroom. My lunch, just a short climb up the stairs. A nap, just one more flight.

While there is never a good time to undergo cancer treatment, my two years began during a busy period. I was performing the final edits of the first Gage book, finishing and editing the second one, and writing the second Harlan Donnally novel. It also occurred while I was investigating a homicide that occurred ten years earlier, one of my last cases.

According to the local police department, a young man in his 20s, found dead in a basement, had been beaten by drug dealers a few weeks earlier and had died of his untreated injuries. During the intervening decade, no one had been arrested, no suspects even identified. The case was old, cold, and closed.

It had been many years since I'd worked in the tough parts of the Bay Area. My practice had developed into one that found me working more often in London, Kiev, or Chennai than in San Francisco, Oakland, or San Jose, and investigating this death meant for me, as for Gage in *White Ghost*, going to once-familiar places and relying on people from the past to catch up to the present.

In searching the housing projects, skid-row motels, and drug corners for witnesses, I found myself surrounded by death, and not only because of the reminders provided by my continuing visits to the Stanford Cancer Center. Driving around those streets was like walking through a cemetery, one made up not of headstones and crypts, but of sidewalks and corners, streets and alleys, front steps and backyards, empty lots and abandoned houses, each a reminder that many of those in the generation I once knew and on whom I had once relied to get me to the facts behind the tales were dead.

As I was talking to an old-timer outside the liquor store at Eighth and Campbell in West Oakland, I thought of Stymie Taylor, a damaged man who'd spent much of his life in prison, but who many times knew someone or something that helped me get to the truth. I stopped in to visit his mother, who had been at his bedside when he died. By then she'd outlived four of her children. She told me Sunday dinners had become a time of empty chairs.

Driving past a drug-dealing spot in East Oakland, I thought of Henry Scott, a cunning man who'd done a lot of bad in his life. I saw him last when he dropped by my office about a dozen years ago. I'm not sure why he came to see me and I'm not sure he knew why either. I was long out of his world, but by his walk and his talk, I understood the place he still held in it. I told him if he stayed in the Bay Area, he'd be a dead man, and a couple of months later he was, shot down outside a bayside nightclub.

And there were many more. Way too many more.

I passed the corner flower shop near the 65th Avenue housing project, within gunshot distance of hundreds of murders in the previous 30 years, and I remembered a sign I'd seen in the window

in 1986: *Funeral Sale*. There are so many things wrong with that phrase, so disturbing anyone would even think it, I'll just let the image of that storefront speak the thousand words for itself.

I drove through the once infamous intersection of 98th and Edes where in 1989 I had been trapped as men shot at each other from opposite corners. At least I'd had my car's sheet metal around me. The people running and ducking didn't. Six rounds were exchanged in seconds, the gunfight was over, and the shooters fled, leaving nothing behind but lead and a memory.

Hairless, fatigued, pale, infused with chemotherapy drugs, and on the hunt for witnesses, I walked into the courtyard of an apartment building where I had been told one was living. It was also where years earlier a drug dealer had me at gunpoint. It struck me that if he'd pulled the trigger I wouldn't have lived to die of cancer. I saw where I'd been standing and where he'd been standing, a dead strip of concrete on which there had occurred a live moment. I remembered his hand coming up out of his pocket and the look in his eyes.

They say cancer is the emperor of all maladies. At least on that day, it wasn't. It was a man with a gun.

In the end, it had turned out to be just another day in the life. He went his way. And I went mine.

Ultimately, I located witnesses who told me that the men who had beaten the victim and inflicted the injuries that led to his death weren't drug dealers at all: they were undercover police officers, and the homicide detective assigned to the investigation had known it almost from the start.

Based on the testimony of these witnesses and admissions by some of the officers involved, a federal judge later ruled that the

department had engaged in a decade-long cover-up. In truth, the injustice went far beyond the death and the conspiracy. Not only did the detective remain in the homicide unit even after his role in the case became known inside the police department, but upon his retirement, the district attorney, the chief law enforcement officer in the county, hired him to work as an inspector in her office. And the lieutenant who supervised the officers, who was present at the time of the assault and who engaged in what the department admitted was an attempt to influence officers' reports of the beating, was assigned to head the internal affairs unit and promoted to the rank of captain.

I considered using the death of this young man as the basis of a Harlan Donnally novel, but unlike the mayors, city council members, judges, prosecutors, police chiefs, and city managers who served during these years, no reader of fiction would tolerate this kind of ending.

Some of Gage's thoughts in *White Ghost* are ones I had as I searched for witnesses, and they are at least some of the thoughts all cancer patients have as we carry on. Among other things, it meant thinking about time and what is worth spending it on and a reminder that the young man whose death I was investigating died at about the same time as I was first diagnosed. His life was stolen, beaten out of him by fist and boot, but mine remained—it still remains—my own to spend. And at least some of that time I chose to spend walking Graham Gage and Harlan Donnally, and their readers, through the landscape on which I have lived much of my life.

In the end, the decision to publish *White Ghost* was driven by the recognition that the connection between Gage and me in illness is

not much different than the connection between Gage and me as private investigators: both inform my fiction, just as both have informed my life.

Writers are told to write what we know, and this is what I know.

STEVEN GORE is an American thriller writer and author of the Graham Gage (*White Ghost*, 2016; *Power Blind*, 2012; *Final Target* and *Absolute Risk*, 2010) and Harlan Donnally (*A Criminal Defense*, 2013, and *Act of Deceit*, 2011) series. Gore is a former private investigator in the San Francisco Bay Area whose novels draw on his investigations of murder, fraud, money laundering, organized crime, political corruption, and drug, sex, and arms trafficking in Europe, Asia, and Latin America. Find out more about the author and books at www.stevengore.com.

ERIN HART

The Nora Gavin/Cormac Maguire Novels

It was actually my mother who introduced me to forensic science—long before television shows like *CSI* ever hit the airwaves. My mom worked as a medical lab technician in the 1970s and 80s, and required continuing education for re-certification. Her two main loves were epidemiology and forensic science—she'd come home from seminars with tales on topics like salmonella outbreaks, mitochondrial DNA, and blood spatter, and cheerfully share her newfound knowledge with the family at the dinner table. Good thing none of us were squeamish!

When I started writing novels about Cormac Maguire and Nora Gavin, an archaeologist and pathologist who team up to solve recent murders and ancient mysteries, I knew I wanted to include history, archaeology, folklore, traditional music and song, as well as a certain level of forensic detail. I was fascinated by the work of Irish archaeologists and pathologists—real people I was lucky enough to meet and interview in the course of my research.

In each of my novels, there's a person from a different time who turns up at least partially preserved in a bog. My characters, Cormac and Nora, are specialists in this area—wetlands archaeology, and specifically human remains from bogs. The most amazing thing about finding someone in a bog is that they're almost miraculously preserved, as Cormac Maguire observes in *Haunted Ground:*

> Fewer than fifty such discoveries had ever been made in Irish bogs, and they offered an unparalleled opportunity to gaze directly into the past. Peat bogs not only preserved skin, hair, and vital organs, but even subtle facial expressions, and often revealed what a person who drew his dying breath twenty centuries ago had taken for his last meal on earth.

My first interview subject as I researched the series was Dr. Barry Raftery, head of the archaeology department at University College Dublin. He was about ten years old in the mid-1950s when his father (also an archaeologist, and head of the National Museum of Ireland), was called to a house in County Sligo where two brothers cutting turf in a bog had stumbled upon the perfectly preserved severed head of a beautiful red-haired girl. Though Dr. Raftery was only a child at the time, he remembered the girl's head in detail, right down to her flaming red hair, the eyes "staring out at the world, it seemed in terror," and the clean cut across the neck that said she'd been beheaded. No one knows what happened to that girl, but she was a real person, and she began to haunt my dreams. Who was she? What was she doing in the bog? Where was the rest of her? What could she possibly have done to be punished so brutally? My imagination couldn't resist her story.

I took all of those indelible forensic details from Barry Raftery and put the red-haired victim on a mortuary table in the present day. Bog bodies discovered these days undergo modern forensic examinations to determine cause of death—as it turns out, many bog people from 2,000 years ago were actually victims of ritual sacrifice, which became the theme for my second book, *Lake of Sorrows*.

I also got to interview Dr. Máire Delaney, Ireland's foremost expert on bog remains, who happened to be a professor of anatomy at Trinity College Medical School and a master's student in archaeology. I'd already given Dr. Delaney's job and keen interest in archaeology to my character Nora Gavin and was fortunate to spend a couple of hours chatting with the real person my character was based upon. Dr. Delaney gave me all sorts of details about how a person might go about extricating human remains from a bog (digging in wet peat with bare hands), and in particular how to excavate a body that might not be intact.

As Ireland's bog body expert, Dr. Delaney was involved in forensic exams and was a font of information about real cases she had handled. (She also upended my plot twist relying on DNA evidence from a bog body, since—as she very kindly explained—being buried in a bog for 350 years wreaks havoc with nuclear DNA. I had to switch my evidence of maternal-child relationship to mitochondrial DNA, which experts tell me is far tougher stuff!)

In preparation for *Lake of Sorrows*, I got to spend a couple of days out on a dig at an industrial bog where peat is harvested by the ton for burning in power plants. My guides there were two archaeologists, Jane Whitaker and Ellen O'Carroll. Ellen had recently come across

a 2,000-year-old pair of mummified legs, perhaps from a victim of Iron Age human sacrifice, which had caused quite a stir in archaeological circles and was reported in the *Irish Times*.

As it turns out, forensic examination and analysis can help us understand much more about ancient people than their cause of death. As I mentioned, sometimes their last meal is preserved, which tells about their diet and living conditions. Hair can be measured for isotopes that tell us where they lived, where they traveled, about their drinking water and the levels of protein in their diet. Pollen collected from creases in their skin can tell us about the environment in which they lived. One 2,000-year-old Irish bog man discovered in 2004 sported hair gel made from the sap of a tree that only grows in the Mediterranean. Forensic details like these prove scientifically fascinating, and offer excellent fodder for fiction as well.

My latest novel, *The Book of Killowen*, is based on the real discovery of a 9th-century book of Psalms in a bog. Seven years earlier, workmen had found a monk's leather satchel a few yards away in the very same bog. As a crime writer, my first reaction to hearing about these two pieces of forensic evidence was: *Where's the guy who was carrying the book? Are we looking at a crime scene?* Strangely, no body has turned up in that bog. Not yet, anyway.

ERIN HART writes archaeological crime novels set in the shadowy boglands of Ireland. The four books in her Nora Gavin/Cormac Maguire series (*Haunted Ground, Lake of Sorrows, False Mermaid*, and *The Book of Killowen*) have been translated into eleven foreign languages, shortlisted for mystery's prestigious

Anthony and Agatha awards, and included in many annual lists of Top Ten Crime Novels by ALA/Booklist and others. Erin lives in Saint Paul, MN, with her husband, Irish button accordion legend Paddy O'Brien, and frequently travels to Ireland, leading tours and carrying out essential research in bogs and cow pastures and castles and pubs. Her website is www.erinhart.com.

LINDA GORDON HENGERER

Dying for Holiday Tea

Like the best afternoon teas, elements of my novella *Dying for Holiday Tea: A Beach Tea Shop Novella* came from a lot of different places but hopefully combine well. It was inspired by travels in the UK, a lifetime reading detective novels, a tea set and recipe book from my paternal grandmother, and a gingerbread recipe inspired by a dear friend of my maternal great-grandmother.

Traveling with my oldest sister and our mother in England and Scotland in the mid-1980s, we loved the hotels that served afternoon tea or had the makings ready for us in our hotel room. Sightseeing in the cool, damp weather the week before Easter was bearable when we knew that shortbread, fruit, and tea would soon be at hand.

Loving the tradition as I did, I accumulated my own tea things over the years. I added linens, china, and other tea-service odds and ends from browsing shops and thrift stores, but the most treasured

items came from family. My mother gave me four teacups with matching saucers that had belonged to her mother-in-law, the grandmother I never met. Marjorie MacInnes Gordon, my father's mother, died of breast cancer in 1955. Originally from Nova Scotia, she met my grandfather when they both worked for the United Fruit Company in Central America. After my grandfather's death in 1987, I inherited Marjorie's tea and coffee service. A footed tray held a teapot and the larger matching coffeepot. The set included a sugar bowl and creamer, tea strainer and waste bowl, and salt cellars with cobalt blue bowls set into footed silver cradles, with wee spoons to serve the salt. I pictured myself using it, entertaining friends for afternoon tea.

I could also picture people murdering their enemies over it. I grew up reading mysteries, and heisted my father's Dick Francis novels when I was young. Trips to the library resulted in armfuls of age-appropriate stories: Trixie Belden, Cherry Ames, Nancy Drew, the Hardy Boys (although I preferred the girl detectives): I loved them all. I discovered Agatha Christie's Miss Marple and Hercule Poirot, read every Sherlock Holmes, and later fell in love with Sue Grafton's Kinsey Milhone and Sara Paretsky's V.I. Warshawski.

Romance novels, another favorite genre, led me to romantic suspense. I read stories that took place in country houses or city homes, with afternoon tea a familiar set piece. I loved the novels of Victoria Holt, Phyllis A. Whitney, and Mary Stewart: female suspense writers with strong heroines who nonetheless took time in the afternoon for refreshing tea, small sandwiches, and dainty cakes. Over the years, I became a writer myself. I wanted to write about female characters solving their own problems. I came of age during Title IX and

women's liberation, when women could do anything a man could do and often did. Smart, strong, and snarky every now and again—I liked that about the characters in stories that I read, and that's what I decided to write.

I was drawn to the world of cozies for their focus on relationships. Most people have seen or experienced how basic emotions (love, hate, jealousy) can cause people to go off the rails. I enjoy creating a world where families have lived and interacted for generations, and exploring the resulting loves, grievances, and crimes that naturally occur.

A cozy mystery sleuth needs to have reason or occasion to solve crimes. Jessica Fletcher notwithstanding, most people aren't stumbling over bodies. I thought about the mystique of afternoon tea, my enjoyment having tea with family and friends, and the idea for a cozy mystery series set in a tea shop was born. I created three sisters whose remaining parental figure was their grandmother's best friend, a woman they had known all their lives and who helped raise them after the deaths of their parents and grandfather.

The friends and family members who come to Beach Tea Shop provide opportunities for sisters Danielle, Chelsea, and Alexandra Powell to solve crimes with help from BevAnne Wexler. Local residents and tourists come to Beach Tea Shop to relax and take a break, chat or gossip. Conversations might be overheard, and puzzle pieces can be put together by someone who pays attention. An older woman such as BevAnne might be unnoticed when people are talking.

The plot in *Dying for Holiday Tea* centers on finding Nana Jean's gingerbread recipe in her old recipe book. The book is stolen the night after it is found. In the thief's haste to escape, a homeless man

is hit by the escaping vehicle. Local knowledge leads our sleuths to the killer.

A cozy mystery doesn't contain rough language, graphic sex or violence, and the murder or crime happens off the page. Crime isn't cozy, though, and the topics I touch on in this novella are theft and homelessness; other stories tackle insurance fraud, false identity, drug addiction, adultery, and sexual abuse. Bad things happen in small towns just as they do in big cities. A cozy is no guarantee of gentility, and I enjoy the chance to talk about important issues even as I set appealing scenes.

Early in 2015, Joanna Campbell Slan approached me about editing a cozy mystery anthology together. In addition to gathering pieces from other writers, we would also contribute stories. I'd been jotting notes about a series centered on a tea shop for several months; the *Happy Homicides* anthology was the gentle shove I needed to start writing the Beach Tea Shop series.

A few months later, my sisters and I were going through the contents of our father and stepmother's house prior to putting it on the market. We found an old recipe book that belonged to Marjorie, the grandmother I mentioned above. Neither sister wanted it, so I gladly carried it home.

She used an old ledger book and wrote recipes in it, taped in recipes from magazines or newspapers, or just tucked a recipe card between the pages. The book was falling apart and the pages were fragile. The recipes and notes were mainly from the 1930s and 1940s. Some looked interesting and I tagged them to try; others, such as a recipe for beef tongue, were not.

The recipe book that features prominently in *Dying for Holiday Tea* was based on Marjorie's, but the gingerbread recipe came from my mother's side of the family. My great-grandparents lived in Rangeley, Maine. We visited every summer from the time I was 10 until I was 18, at the family camp in nearby Oquossoc. My father came up on the weekends, but my mother, sisters, and I stayed for a month. I took piles of books with me, reading on the glider on the front porch overlooking the sloping lawn to Mooselookmeguntic Lake. It was heaven for a bookworm.

Kaye Housel was a friend of my great-grandmother's and a local silhouette artist. She had a small bakery case in the back corner of her studio, and made gingerbread whenever we came to visit. The smell of warm spices wafting out as we pulled open her door is a memory I'll never forget. The Beach Tea Shop stories are set more than a thousand miles south of Rangeley, in coastal Florida, but I've tried to transplant that wonderful recollection into the novella's balmier setting.

Family memories and experiences are key inspirations for the Beach Tea Shop series. The crimes come from the local newspaper, national news, and topics I feel strongly about, but the connections between characters, the objects they are surrounded with, and even the recipes arise from places and people dear to my heart.

It's my hope that readers will pull up a comfy chair, pour a cup of tea, and settle in to see how justice prevails in *Dying for Holiday Tea* and the other Beach Tea Shop mysteries.

LINDA GORDON HENGERER is the author of the Beach Tea Shop mystery series and several non-fiction books on football and wine pairings. A New Jersey native transplanted to Florida, she enjoys winters with sun and sand instead of snow and freezing temperatures. She is a board member for two non-profit organizations: SafeSpace and Mystery Writers of America-Florida Chapter. She is co-editor of (with Joanna Campbell Slan), and a contributor to, the Happy Homicides cozy mystery anthologies. Visit her at www.lindagordonhengerer.com.

JAMES TATE HILL

Academy Gothic

I never aspired to write a mystery. Most of the books I loved in college—the books I was told I should love—were shelved in the local WaldenBooks under *Literature* rather than *Fiction*. I attended two graduate programs in creative writing, and while no one in either program told us what to read or write, there seemed a tacit understanding among my peers that we would read the kinds of books that won Pulitzers and National Book Awards, that we would write elegant short stories about the human condition which might, if we honed our craft, end up in one of those anthologies our professors assigned us as undergraduates. All this is to say that three years after completing my M.F.A., I was getting tired of the kinds of books I was reading and increasingly nauseated by what I was writing.

Writers I respected had uttered the name Raymond Chandler with enough frequency and affection that I checked out a copy of *Farewell, My Lovely* from the library. It wasn't the criminal elements

or the murder plot that hooked me as much as Chandler's wit and eye for detail. And if we're to believe the oft-repeated, possibly apocryphal story about William Faulkner phoning Chandler while adapting *The Big Sleep* for film, plots were sometimes beside the point for Chandler himself. "Who *did* kill the chauffeur?" Faulkner supposedly asked Ray, who supposedly responded with a very long pause. "I'm not sure," Ray finally replied.

Few things bring greater comfort to a writer who hasn't yet learned how to plot than hearing a respected author diminish its importance. True or not, the Faulkner-Chandler exchange downplays how well-plotted most of the Philip Marlowe novels are in comparison to *The Big Sleep*, which was, after all, Chandler's first book. And as witty a companion as Marlowe is, wit alone doesn't make me turn pages any more than artful descriptions of a forlorn landscape. The more my reading list shifted in the direction of so-called genre writers, the more I envied these writers' abilities to make things happen on the page. Meanwhile, the drama in the novel I had just completed, a romantic comedy about a copy editor's friendship with a pro wrestler, which my then agent was unsuccessfully shopping around, consisted of a marriage on the precipice of divorce. Following that novel's failure, it was clear I needed to raise the stakes in my storytelling, but how this might be done remained a mystery.

After a decade of teaching at the college level, watching budget cuts inflict new and interesting wounds on faculty and students alike, I thought I had the ingredients to cook up an academic satire. The question I couldn't yet answer was why anyone beyond those currently toiling in higher education would care about its myriad problems. Gradually, seeing the impatience and frustration in my

colleagues' eyes turn to full-blown anger as our jobs were threatened on a weekly basis, breathing the noxious fumes of urine and ant spray ten feet from our flimsy cubicles, the world of our decaying college didn't feel so different from the seedy underworld where gangsters and detectives killed one another. Weren't money and resentment the same reasons people kill people in all those Ross Macdonald and Raymond Chandler and Patricia Highsmith novels I had been reading?

If I was going to write a mystery, I supposed I needed a detective. If I had learned anything at all in graduate school it was that every character has to want something, and a novel whose main character wants nothing more than to solve a crime wasn't one I wanted to read, let alone write. My favorite literary detectives were men like Lawrence Block's Matt Scudder, the alcoholic who becomes a recovering alcoholic, characters with flaws that complicate their personalities as much as the plots. I made a list of flaws that interested me and brought them in for an audition, but only one got the call back. Since the age of 16, I have lived with a visual impairment I had never explored in my writing, fiction or nonfiction. If the disability seemed like a good way to complicate the plot, the pride that for many years made my impairment feel like something to hide seemed like a good way to complicate my main character.

For many, the pleasure of mysteries comes from watching pieces of a puzzle fit neatly together, from sense being made of the world that is, no matter how you slice it, inherently chaotic. But a good mystery, I've discovered—as a reader and as a writer—is so much more than a good mystery. And the scary truth—too scary to acknowledge in graduate school—is that the best literary fiction also

requires a strong plot. I hope I've created in my legally blind amateur detective someone occasionally as interesting as the crime scenes and dying college for which he serves as tour guide. I hope I've created students and faculty of the fictional college who are more than possible murder suspects. I hope *Academy Gothic* provides some satirical insight into the decaying institution of higher education in America. Whatever I've created, the differences between literature and genre fiction have come to feel less like a mystery than a red herring.

JAMES TATE HILL is the author of *Academy Gothic* (Southeast Missouri State University Press, 2015), winner of the Nilsen Prize for a First Novel. His stories and essays have appeared in *Story Quarterly*, *The Sonora Review*, and the Literary Hub blog among others, and he is the fiction editor for the literary journal *Monkeybicycle*. Originally from Charleston, West Virginia, he lives in North Carolina with his wife, Lori. Visit the author online at www.jamestatehill.com or follow him on Twitter @jamestatehill.

ANDREW HUGHES

The Convictions of John Delahunt

The crux of my novel *The Convictions of John Delahunt* has been summarized as follows: On a cold December morning in 1841 Dublin, a small boy is enticed away from his mother and savagely murdered. This could be just one more death in a city riven by poverty, inequality, and political unrest, but the murder causes a public outcry. It appears the culprit—a feckless student named John Delahunt—is also an informant in the pay of the police authorities at Dublin Castle. Strangely, the young man seems neither to regret what he did, nor fear his punishment. Instead, as he awaits the hangman in his cell, John Delahunt decides to tell his story in a final, deeply unsettling statement.

I remember when I first came across John Delahunt's story: it was while researching my first book, a social history based on the inhabitants of Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin, called *Lives Less Ordinary*. One of the square's residents was Edward Pennefather, Lord Chief Justice

of the Queen's Bench. He presided over the trial of Irish political leader and advocate for Catholic emancipation Daniel O'Connell in 1844 for conspiracy to repeal the Act of Union, which had joined Ireland with Great Britain. In *Lives Less Ordinary*, I found it was possible to retell much of Irish history through the perspectives of Fitzwilliam Square residents, by following them to political gatherings, or onto the battlefield, or in the case of Mr. Pennefather, into the courtroom.

So I set about searching for descriptions of the trial. The following, for instance, was written by Anthony Trollope: "Look at that big-headed, pig-faced fellow on the right—that's Pennefather! He's the blackest sheep of the lot—and the head of them! He's a thoroughbred Tory, and as fit to be a judge as I am to be a general."

The outcome of O'Connell's trial was never in doubt, mainly because the jury was packed with twelve Protestants. Trollope again: "Fancy a jury chosen out of all Dublin, and not one Catholic!" Charles Gavan Duffy described the Repeal leader's reaction to the guilty verdict: "O'Connell himself at that time whispered to one of the traversers that the Attorney General was moderate in only charging them with conspiracy, as those twelve gentlemen would have made no difficulty in convicting them of the murder of the Italian boy."

I paused when I came upon that passage, intrigued by the title given to the crime, the clues about the unnamed victim, and the fact that O'Connell could allude to its notoriety. Duffy added his own footnote: "The murder of the Italian boy was a mysterious crime which had recently caused a sensation in Dublin and baffled the skill of the police."

When I sought out articles relating to the murder, I first came across the names Dominico Garlibardo, Richard Cooney, and the crown witness, John Delahunt.

Lives Less Ordinary stemmed from my fascination with the people who lived in Dublin's Georgian houses, and the fragments of history they left behind: a coat of arms hidden in a stained-glass fanlight; a letter from a young lady to her mother describing her first dinner party; a simple childhood drawing of infant brothers playing in a nursery, viewed while knowing one of their lives would end on a battlefield. The research carried out for that book provided a setting for Delahunt's story, as well as a cast of characters. Bit-part players such as Professor Lloyd, Dr. Moore, and Captain Dickenson were all, in reality, Fitzwilliam Square inhabitants.

As for Delahunt's exploits, there were any number of sources to consult: medical, court and newspaper reports, editorials and pamphlets. *The Convictions of John Delahunt* is primarily a work of fiction, especially with regard to Delahunt's character, background and family, but the set-piece events were based on real episodes: the attack on Captain Craddock, the murder of Garlibardo, and the murder of Thomas Maguire.

There were two sources that I used directly. The first was the report of a phrenologist who studied and interviewed Delahunt while he was awaiting the gallows in 1842. The doctor even made a plaster cast of Delahunt's head—who knows, that may still exist somewhere, hidden away in someone's loft. By rendering that encounter in the very first scene, I was able to establish my version of Delahunt's character. He's shown to be an object of morbid fascination, someone who is confined and condemned by Victorian society,

but also someone who can closely observe it. It was odd, but often fun, to be in Delahunt's consciousness. Whenever he was faced with a situation, I just had to imagine the most cynical, most darkly humorous response possible, and have him do that. But it was a strange head-space to inhabit, especially when dealing with his crimes and other harrowing scenes.

The second direct source was the convict's final statement. Printed in the newspapers on the morning of his execution, the confession exposed the inner workings of Dublin Castle to public scrutiny and comment. Soon after, a pamphlet appeared in the stalls of booksellers written under the alias, *An Informer*. The pamphlet began:

> Although the public had been previously aware of the nefarious system by which informations [sic] against criminals were obtained in Dublin, they were by no means prepared for the startling disclosure of Delahunt, that the nature of the system was such as to actually tempt the informer to commit the crime, for the sole purpose of prosecuting and convicting an innocent person of it, and thus entitling himself to the blood-money.

In reality, Delahunt's evidence against Richard Cooney wasn't believed, and the murder of the Italian boy remained unsolved. Frank Thorpe, a police magistrate writing his memoirs in 1875, said, "I strongly suspect that if Delahunt really knew anything about the crime, it was owing to himself being the perpetrator." But Thorpe also wished to dispel the notion that Delahunt was in the pay of the Castle:

> For a considerable time after his execution, he was reputed, especially amongst the humbler classes, to have been a police spy, and to have been in receipt of frequent subsidies from the detective office…I feel perfectly satisfied that, instead of deriving the wages of an informer or spy from the metropolitan police or from the constabulary, he never cost the public one penny beyond what sufficed for his maintenance in gaol whilst under committal for his diabolical offence, and to provide the halter which he most thoroughly deserved.

Born in Ireland, **ANDREW HUGHES** was educated at Trinity College, Dublin. It was while researching his acclaimed social history of Fitzwilliam Square—*Lives Less Ordinary: Dublin's Fitzwilliam Square, 1798-1922*—that he first came across the true story of John Delahunt, which inspired his debut novel. Andrew's second novel, *The Coroner's Daughter,* will appear in the UK in February 2017. Andrew lives in Dublin.

D.E. IRELAND

The Eliza Doolittle & Henry Higgins Mysteries

As a writing team, we are known as D.E. Ireland. In real life, we are Meg Mims and Sharon Pisacreta. Longtime friends and critique partners, we were already successful authors individually. However, we had been looking for an idea to collaborate on for years. But not until one summer when Meg was driving across Michigan to visit Sharon on the lakeshore did the right idea strike. While singing to the *My Fair Lady* soundtrack in her car, Meg had a lightbulb moment. Why not turn Eliza Doolittle and Henry Higgins into amateur sleuths? It was no surprise that Sharon was just as enthusiastic about the premise. Both of us are passionate Anglophiles, as well as being fans of both *My Fair Lady* and the witty Shaw play it is based on. We quickly decided to tackle the project together, which led to endlessly rereading the play, watching film versions of *Pygmalion* and the musical, and making detailed lists of the speech patterns of Higgins, Eliza, Alfred Doolittle, and other Shaw characters.

Naturally, we needed a name for our new writing partnership. Sharon came up with the pseudonym "D.E. Ireland," using the country as a surname to honor George Bernard Shaw's Dublin birthplace. "D.E." was chosen as a reference to Eliza Doolittle—only backwards. A bit of tongue in cheek there, since she hails from the slums of London's East End but now mingles with the upper classes, often fooling them as to her origins.

Since George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* is in the public domain, we used the play as the series "Bible." Even the slightest reference in *Pygmalion* has been incorporated into the novels. For example, when Eliza moves to 27A Wimpole Street, one of the few possessions she brings with her is an empty birdcage. We created a canary called Petey that our heroine once owned…and tragically lost. Other plot points in our novels are also drawn from the play. Due to a mischievous decision by Higgins in *Pygmalion*, Eliza's dustman father Alfred is now a member of the prosperous middle class. In our series, he and his vulgar wife Rose have moved to fancy digs in Pimlico, with all the mishaps their awkward new social status implies.

As for our heroine, Eliza finally wins Professor Higgins's respect at the end of *Pygmalion*, but she goes on to earn his gratitude in our first book, *Wouldn't It Be Deadly*. There she saves him from being hanged for murdering his phonetics rival, the "hairy Hungarian," a suspicious character mentioned in the play. Indeed, Shaw's *Pygmalion* set up Book 1 of our series beautifully.

Both of us are history buffs. Since the series is set in 1913 London, we did extensive research on Scotland Yard, late Edwardian society, the suffrage movement, and crime in London's East End. Although the Edwardian era officially ended in 1910, not until the onset of

World War I did society begin to radically modernize. We compiled numerous research files on Edwardian life, including detailed street maps of London and historical photos of the various settings in the series.

We particularly loved fleshing out the backgrounds of Higgins and Eliza, along with the other characters from *Pygmalion*, such as Colonel Pickering, Mrs. Pearce, and the Eynsford Hill family. We always refer back to Shaw's *Pygmalion* and the play's appendices and notes, which describe Higgins's phonetics lab and his mother's Chelsea flat in great detail. The second book in the series, *Move Your Blooming Corpse*, expanded our research into horse racing, Royal Ascot, the Henley Regatta, and the suffrage movement. And while electricity, autos, the telephone, and the cinema were becoming the norm by 1913, life was still governed by rigid social rules—which both Eliza and Higgins often ignore.

Because it offers traditional mystery with a cozy flair, we chose to keep the series light, being mindful that it was inspired by Shaw's witty and humorous play. Of course, we still had to include violent deaths, chilling motives, and dangerous characters. For mystery plotting purposes, we created a cousin for Eliza: Jack Shaw. Like Eliza, he successfully fought his way out of the slums, becoming a Scotland Yard Inspector. And we gave Jack a charming fiancée, who also happens to be a suffragette. This allowed us to add romance and politics to our books—and the opportunity for Eliza to learn a few handy ju-jitsu moves from the suffrage movement leaders.

Our actual writing routine begins with Sharon. Because she loves to plot, she creates an intensive, detailed outline for each book—the last was 28 single-spaced pages. With outline in hand, we alternate

writing chapters for the first draft. We never stop to edit until after the first draft is complete, unless something in the plot has to be drastically altered. Two more drafts follow, in which we edit each other's work using Word's "track changes" tool; this allows each of us to see the alterations the other has made. When we've "nailed down" our chapters into a final draft, a week is devoted to what we call the audio part of the process. Since we live on opposite sides of Michigan, this usually occurs via phone. We take turns reading the manuscript aloud to each other, changing what doesn't sound natural and fixing typos. It's a time-consuming process, but well worth it.

The result has been a successful collaboration, which has produced three books so far, as well as a 2014 Agatha nomination for Best Historical Mystery. Even better, our friendship has survived intact! As Eliza Doolittle would say, "How loverly." And stay tuned for the third book in the series, *Get Me To The Grave On Time*, when Eliza and Higgins attend four deadly weddings and a funeral.

D.E. IRELAND is a team of award-winning authors, Meg Mims and Sharon Pisacreta. Friends since college, they enjoyed separate writing careers in romantic suspense and westerns before deciding to collaborate on a series based on George Bernard Shaw's delightful play *Pygmalion*, which inspired the musical *My Fair Lady*. In addition, they each write cozy mysteries for Kensington under the pen names Sharon Farrow and Meg Macy. Sharon's Berry Basket series debuts with *Dying For Strawberries* in October

2016, while the first book in Meg's Teddy Bear series will be launched in Spring/Summer 2017. Find out more about their work as D.E. Ireland at www.deireland.com.

J. SYDNEY JONES

The Viennese Mysteries

The Third Place is the sixth and final installment in my Viennese Mystery series, set at the turn of the 20th century and featuring private inquiries agent Advokat Karl Werthen and his partner in crime detection (and real-life father of criminology), the Austrian Hans Gross. In this series installment, Werthen and Gross investigate the murder of Herr Karl, a renowned headwaiter at one of Vienna's premier cafés. As the investigation turns up new clues, Werthen and Gross are suddenly interrupted in their work by a person they cannot refuse: they are commissioned to locate a missing letter from the Emperor to his mistress, the famous actress Katharina Schratt. Emperor Franz Josef is desperate for the letter not to fall into the wrong hands, for it contains a damning secret. As the intrepid investigators press on with this new investigation, they soon discover that there has also been an attempt to assassinate the emperor. Eventually, Werthen and Gross realize that the case of the murdered headwaiter and the continuing plot to kill the emperor

are connected, and they now face their most challenging and dangerous investigation yet.

This novel takes its title from the Viennese saying, *First is home, next comes work, and then the third place is the coffeehouse*. In fact, much of the inspiration for the writing of this book comes from the Viennese coffeehouse and its history and legends. Dialogue in the book describes the putative origins of the city's first coffeehouse. Vienna was besieged by the Ottoman Empire for two months in mid-1683. After the Turks were routed on September 12, 1683, by a relieving force of 120,000 Germans and Poles, the spoils were handed out all around. The Turks had taken most of their treasury with them, but among other things left behind were sacks and sacks full of coffee beans. The Viennese had yet to discover the joys of coffee; the story—probably mostly myth—goes that a loyal Polish trader named Kolschitzky was rewarded for his spying services during the Turkish siege of Vienna with bags of coffee beans found in the camp of the vanquished Turks. Kolschitzky knew of the wonderful beverage from his time in Constantinople, and he agreed to take these "useless beans" as a further reward for his service to Vienna. He proceeded to open Vienna's first coffeehouse, At the Sign of the Blue Bottle, and started what has become a Viennese institution.

For those of you who love to ponder Lorenz's "butterfly theory" or play "six degrees of separation," the world of Vienna 1900 is no stranger. Going forward or backward in time, you're pretty likely to hit on a link in *fin de siècle* Vienna if you're dealing with someone in the arts, literature, science, or world affairs. From Freud to Mahler, Klimt, and Hitler, the city was an amazing cauldron of cultural

innovation (and, yes, in Hitler's case, destruction) around the turn of the previous century—and you would encounter most if not all of these figures at Vienna's coffeehouses.

At the epicenter of it all was the young polymath Karl Kraus, cultural critic, grammar policeman, and word maven of Vienna 1900. Kraus, a frail-looking man, beavered away for over three decades, single-handedly publishing his magazine, *Die Fackel (The Torch)*. In this journal he took on the hypocrisies of the day, stood up to the rich and the powerful when need be, fought crime and societal stupidity, and generally pissed off everybody. The ultimate aphorist, Kraus termed Vienna 1900 a "laboratory for world destruction."

Kraus has served as a source of information for Werthen several times in my series. In my novel *Requiem in Vienna*, I describe him thusly: "A slight man with a curly head of hair and tiny oval wire-rim glasses that reflected the overhead lights, Kraus dressed like a banker. One of nine children of a Bohemian Jew who had made his money from paper bags, Kraus lived on a family allowance that allowed him to poke fun at everyone in the pages of his journal."

Kraus, frankly, did not care who he angered. And sometimes he paid the price for his outspoken views. Once part of the *Jung Wien* group of writers, including, among others, Arthur Schnitzler—whom Freud termed his double—and the young Felix Salten—later author of *Bambi*—Kraus soon turned against them. In a famous article, he ridiculed the group's coffee-house culture and earned what we now call a bitch slap from Salten at the Café Central for his words. On another occasion, he took a punch on the nose from an irate cabaret performer who did not care for Kraus's reviews.

Kraus was most definitely a man of contradictions, and no one ever said he was likable. Something of the H.L. Mencken of Vienna, Kraus enjoyed a turn of phrase, enjoyed shocking people. But most of all he enjoyed being at the center of the rippling pool of 1900 Vienna's artists and intellectuals. He was the ultimate filter of gossip in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna; he knew where all the bodies were buried.

Kraus was also a major celebrity in his day. "I am already so popular that anyone who vilifies me becomes more popular than I am," he liked to say. Besides the regular publication of his journal, Kraus was also a performer. Again from *Requiem in Vienna:*

> Despite his slightness of bearing, Kraus had a fine speaking voice. He had tried for a career as an actor as a younger man, but stage fright had intervened. He was said to be experimenting with a new form of entertainment, however, much like the American Mark Twain and his famous one-person shows. At fashionable salons, Kraus was already entertaining the cognoscenti with his interpretations of Shakespeare and with readings from his own writings. Another of his aphorisms Werthen had heard: "When I read, it is not acted literature; but what I write is written acting."

And oh my, but he makes one hell of a fictional character. So acerbic, so full of self-contradictions, so full of himself. I am not sure I would have liked to sit down over a cup of coffee or glass of wine with the man—nor he with me, I am sure—but anybody who could quip that "psychoanalysis is that disease of which it purports to be the cure" would have been worth knowing.

J. SYDNEY JONES is the author of numerous books of fiction and nonfiction, including the novels of the critically acclaimed Viennese Mystery series: *The Empty Mirror, Requiem in Vienna, The Silence, The Keeper of Hands, A Matter of Breeding* and *The Third Place.* He lived for many years in Vienna and has written several other books about the city, including the narrative history *Hitler in Vienna: 1907-1913*, the popular walking guide *Viennawalks*, and the thriller *Time of the Wolf.* Jones is also the author of the stand-alone thrillers *Ruin Value: A Mystery of the Third Reich* (2013), *The German Agent* (2014), and *Basic Law* (2015). He has lived and worked as a correspondent and freelance writer in Paris, Florence, Molyvos, and Donegal, and currently resides with his wife and son on the coast of Central California. Visit him at www.jsydneyjones.com.

M.R.C. KASASIAN

The Gower Street Detective Books

For nearly five years, way back in the 1970's, I studied dentistry at University College Hospital, London, and for most of that time I lived in the Medical School hostel on Gower Street. This consisted of nine Victorian terraced houses knocked into one but still retaining their individuality, each having a staircase rising four lofty stories. I lived in number 125, the old black front door sealed but still bearing the original brass lion's-head knocker. My room was in the basement at the front, looking into the moat that separated it from the pavement and with a view of the constant stream of pedestrians' feet hurrying about their business.

In one corner of the room was a substantial cupboard built into a recess with a few shelves above a broken wooden rail. It was when I was standing in the cupboard trying to mend that rail that I had an itch in my foot and, bending to scratch it, noticed that a board in the base had tipped upwards at one end. Stepping back I found that the other boards lifted too and that beneath them was a cavity in

which had been placed a long wooden box, thick with dust and mold. My curiosity aroused, I hauled it—with considerable difficulty, for it was extremely heavy—out and onto the floor. The wood was so rotten that it was breaking up under its own weight to reveal a grey surface underneath. Lifting the hinged lid, I realized that the box was lined in asbestos (this was before we had much idea of the perils of such a material) and packed with red leather-covered books, the top left of one embossed in gold letters *Journal 1882*. I took the book out and opened the cover to find the first page dated Sunday, January 1st, and, beneath the date, four paragraphs of neat little writing in pencil. *A cold start to the year and wet. Spent most of the day attempting to make some sense of poor Papa's accounts. They are such a muddle I hardly know where to begin but I am determined put my affairs in order this year.*

There followed a few sentences about bonds and shares and I was rapidly losing interest until a line near the end caught my eye. *A frugal supper in the snug watching the sun set over Ashurst Beacon.*

I flicked through a few pages and it was soon apparent that the diarist was writing from The Grange, a house I had often passed on walks to admire the very same view at the top of Parbold Hill in the village where I had grown up.

I skimmed through. There was more talk of financial problems, solicitors, visiting a friend with the unlikely name of Maudy Glass and taking a train from Parbold to Wigan to London on the very route I had travelled the best part of a century later.

There was some chatter about sharing cigarettes and gin with a slightly disreputable teacher's wife called Harriet Fitzpatrick and realizing that Mr. Sidney Grice (the writer's godfather, with whom

she was going to live) was a famous private detective. The writer's name, it transpired, was March Middleton.

I read on and, almost immediately, March was embroiled in investigating the murder of a young woman in the East End. She and her guardian set off to examine the victim's body and then: *It occurs to me that much that am I writing of is highly confidential and that it might be prudent to use my father's code system to protect my account from prying eyes.*

And there it began, a meaningless (to me) jumble of numbers separated by commas and broken into small groups of differing lengths by spaces.

At first I nearly tossed the book aside, but I was intrigued. I had played with codes as a child. I could have a go at cracking this one. After a fruitless hour or so I went to the pub.

In the Duke of Wellington pub, which was down a side road off Gower Street, I treated myself to a half-pint of bitter which was all I could afford and sat at the bar with the book and a paper and pencil. Some of the numbers seemed too big to represent the letters of the alphabet, going well over 100.

"It appears to be a straight number-for-letter transposition," a voice said and I twisted my neck to see a dark-haired man in an immaculately tailored three-piece pinstripe suit peering over my shoulder.

"I thought of that," I told him, slightly affronted at his presumptuousness. "But I can't see any pattern to it."

"May I?" The stranger leafed through a few pages. "It's a sort of hobby of mine."

We chatted a bit more and it was clear that he knew a great deal more about the subject than I did and, before I knew it, I had agreed to lend him the journal over the weekend.

"You'll be alright with Mr. Smith," Tom, the barman told me. "He's a regular here and a real gent."

And, true to his word, Mr. Smith returned on the Monday evening, carrying a black attaché case.

"Daniel, Chapter 4 Verse 37," he announced, placing the journal on the bar and a typed sheet of paper on top reading in double-spaced lines, "NOW I NEBUCHADNEZZAR PRAISE AND EXTOL AND HONOR THE KING OF HEAVEN, ALL WHOSE WORKS *ARE* TRUTH, AND HIS WAYS JUDGMENT: AND THOSE THAT WALK IN PRIDE HE IS ABLE TO ABASE."

"It's quite simple," he explained. "You just need a sentence containing all the letters of the alphabet, and the Victorians did love their Bible quotes."

Underneath each letter he had printed a number, 1 to 137.

"The only letter that's missing is Q. So she gives that the number 138."

"So N is 1," I began but Mr. Smith corrected me patiently.

"Only the first time she uses it. The second time she picks N's second appearance so it becomes number 5."

"So A can be..." I counted along. "Numbers 11, 17, 21 and so on."

"Exactly," he agreed.

"But how on earth did you work that out?"

"Had a bit of help from the office computer," he confessed. "I've done a sample paragraph for you. After that you're on your own."

And I saw that on the back of the page he had written: *I saw now what Mrs. Dillinger meant by 'so much blood'. The walls and furniture were splattered with it, dried and blackened and there was a coagulated puddle with dozens of bootprints all over the uncarpeted floor.*

There followed March Middleton's description of the scene of the murder of Sarah Ashby, which she used in her account of what was to be known as *The Mangle Street Murders*.

I thanked Mr. Smith and was financially relieved when he turned down my offer to buy him a drink. He came back to Duke of Wellington often but it was soon obvious that he had no interest in me other than the intellectual challenge I had set him. He did not even care what the rest of the diaries said and, with the pressure of exams and later the commitments of general practice and family life, it was many years before I had the leisure time to translate them in full. There were 32 volumes in all and they had been placed in their asbestos hiding-place in the basement in 1940 to protect them during the Blitz.

About six months later I spotted Mr. Smith across the road in Gower Street at the Euston Road end, smartly attired as always and carrying his attaché case and a rolled umbrella. I raised my hand in greeting but he was hurrying away through the side door of a nondescript 1960s building and I never saw him again.

It was only after I quit dentistry and gave the journals the attention they deserved that I discovered that some of them had been published

but were now long out of print and that many of the adventures—*The Sign of the Fourteen*, for example—had been shamelessly plagiarized by the alleged creator of Sherlock Holmes, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who had been forced to settle with March Middleton out of court to save himself from public humiliation and bankruptcy.

I did a little research into the history of Gower Street. Wikipedia was an obvious starting point and there was a brief statement at the end of the article. "From 1976 until 1995 the headquarters of MI5 were an anonymous grey office block at 140 Gower Street, adjacent to the Euston Road. The site has since been redeveloped."

And so it appears that we have Her Majesty's Secret Service to thank for translating the lost journals of March Middleton and resurrecting her accounts of her wonderful adventures with Mr. Sidney Grice, the ingenious, albeit curmudgeonly, Gower Street Detective.

M. R. C. KASASIAN is the author of the Gower Street Detective Books: *The Mangle Street Murders, The Curse of the House of Foskett, Death Descends on Saturn Villa,* and *The Secrets of Gaslight Lane*. He lives with his wife in England. Follow him on Twitter @MRCKASASIAN.

JENNIFER KINCHELOE

The Secret Life of Anna Blanc

In 1910, Alice Stebbins Wells became the first female cop in Los Angeles. Brilliant, brave, and politic, she held her own with the boys. No, she outshone them. I stumbled across a story about her life—just a couple of paragraphs, because very little is written about her. It sparked my imagination and led me to write my novel *The Secret Life of Anna Blanc*.

I had intended to write a sensible, experienced, civic-minded character, like Alice Stebbins Wells. Instead, my protagonist came tumbling out as a cross between Sherlock Holmes and Scarlett O'Hara.

I couldn't help it. The character wrote herself.

In my book, socialite Anna Blanc buys off her chaperone and uses an alias to secretly get a job as a matron with the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD). She uncovers a string of brothel murders that the cops are unwilling to investigate. Anna must solve the crimes while maintaining her secret identity.

If the police find out, she's fired. If her father finds out, he'll disown her. If her fiancé finds out, he'll call off the engagement *and* the money he's pouring into her father's collapsing bank.

Writing this book was a stretch for me. I knew nothing about the Progressive Era. I had never written historical fiction. Actually, I had never written a novel.

Years of research awaited me, and over 150 drafts of what would become *The Secret Life of Anna Blanc*.

Because men wrote history and women are mostly left out, my research focused on things written *during* the early 1900s, not just books written about them. I read women's memoirs, novels written by women, advice books for brides and single women, a female humorist's tips on dealing with men, cookbooks, books on how to do laundry, an etiquette manual, the ladies' section of the newspaper, advertisements, love song lyrics, suffrage speeches, court transcripts, want ads, and newspaper stories about women and women's organizations. I found a historian who studied early 20th-century prostitution in Los Angeles and obtained her dissertation on microfiche from the library.

I also read about men and their world: sermons, a coroner's manual, eyewitness accounts, a police department's annual report, and lots and lots of newspaper articles about the antics of the LAPD and their quarry.

Period photographs helped me to flesh out the details, to provide color and texture to the novel. I collected over 30,000 of them, all still viewable on my Pinterest page.

I continued to research the book until it was typeset for printing.

Once I had a handle on the period, I had to displace real history to make room for my story. I chose to fictionalize everyone. In 1907, the LAPD employed two police matrons, Alice Stebbins Wells and Aletha Gilbert. I erased them from history, replacing them with Anna Blanc and a second fictional character, Matron Clemens (who really is modeled after Alice Stebbins Wells).

I'm going to be perfectly frank here. Historically, Anna Blanc's character felt like a leap. Police matrons were required to be older, sober-minded women who had been married and had a zeal for lost souls. They were typically from the middle class. But that's not the protagonist who called to me. The one that flowed out of my fingertips was naïve, spoiled, beautiful, and super rich.

There is a tension when you write historical fiction. How much liberty can you take for the sake of the story? I couldn't hold true to the requirements for LAPD matrons and write this particular book. That bothered me. But the character made sense in my story, and I had a good rationale for how she got where she got, so I finished the novel hoping no one would call me on it.

Then something marvelous happened. After the book was written, I stumbled across a newly published biography about a real-life police matron, Fanny Bixby (later Fanny Bixby Spenser), who was young, beautiful, single, and the daughter of one of the richest men in California. She became a matron in Long Beach in 1908 when she was still in her 20s. Like Anna Blanc, Fanny carried a gun. More than once, she took a beating. Like my fictional character, high society and Fanny's family frowned upon her law enforcement endeavors. Suddenly, my Anna Blanc seemed more plausible.

It reminded me that the actual past (that is, all of the things that really happened in the great, wide world) is far broader than my conception of history (that is, a story full of holes, constructed primarily by white men). In the real past, rules were broken. Mores were occasionally thrown out the window. Unlikely characters did extraordinary things. Women especially transcended their role in society. Just because we don't know something happened doesn't mean it couldn't have happened—or didn't.

This discovery taught me to trust my instincts. Because history is fraught with gaps, we have to use our imaginations to make it come alive. Research only goes so far. We fill in the holes with story. And most of the time, our fiction is no stranger than the truth.

When I finished *The Secret Life of Anna Blanc*, I contacted the Los Angeles historian I've mentioned, who specialized in prostitution in the early 20th century. I begged her to read the book and review it for accuracy. Although I was a total stranger, she graciously agreed.

She gave the novel the big thumbs up, and said it made her smile.

JENNIFER KINCHELOE is a research scientist turned writer of historical fiction. She earned a Master's degree in Public Health from Loma Linda University and a Ph.D. in Health Services from UCLA. She adores kickboxing, yoga, and developing complex statistical models. She was on the faculty at UCLA, where she spent 11 years conducting research to inform health policy. She currently lives in Denver, Colorado, with her husband and two children. *The Secret Life of Anna Blanc* is her first novel. For more

information, visit her website at www.jenniferkincheloe.com and her Pinterest page (where thousands of images related to the book and its time period can be found) at www.pinterest.com/jrobin66.

MARY LAWRENCE

The Bianca Goddard Mysteries

Interest sparks imagination.

My fascination with alchemy and Tudor London began over 20 years ago. Out of necessity, since I was pursuing a degree in cytotechnology, I focused on medical science to the exclusion of literature and history during my college years. Once settled in a career, I happily pursued "rounding out" my education by reading what I used to have no time for—Shakespeare and British history. In particular, I was drawn to the use of language in the Tudor era; what began as a curiosity became an obsession.

There are as many reasons for why people write as there are writers. I could drone on about why *I* put pen to paper, but this essay is not about that—although in order for *anyone* to write *anything* there must be a motive behind the effort. And if one attempts to write a novel, the motive must be strong enough to pull a person through the harrowing and not always satisfying journey of completing it.

Instead, I will comment on my own starting point for *Death of an Alchemist*, and share some thoughts on how I moved from an idea to a finished novel.

By the time I was offered a book deal, I had been scribbling away for over two decades. Being published was not inevitable. I liked what I wrote; I liked my style and my voice, but I spent many years hearing why no one else did. Granted, I received just enough encouragement to delude myself into continuing. And herein lies a hard-found truth—if a writer wants to be published at a traditional house and has no connections or celebrity status to boost his or her chances, then that person must possess a pathological ability to refute rejection. I came up with buckets of excuses as to why "X" passed on my magnum opus, and I came up with just as many ideas on how to creatively "off" X in retaliation. Years of committing mental murder is probably why I have finally found my niche.

The relief I felt being offered a book deal was soon replaced by panic, compounded by sadness. I wrote *The Alchemist's Daughter* as a stand-alone novel. Now my publisher wanted two more Bianca Goddard mysteries in two years. But the same day I learned a publisher wanted my book, I found out that a close friend, who had been one of the very few people in my life who believed in my writing, had been diagnosed with stage IV cancer.

My joy came at a cost. When events collide and color our human experience, it is our nature to look for ironies and reasons to make sense of an emotional juncture. Plumbing the depths for meaning comes naturally to all of us; writers had better be pretty good at it. For me, this examination was essential in helping me get through

the next year. Questions of mortality, loss, and whether the soul is immortal constantly ran through my mind.

The necessity to write a second book became the vessel for dealing with my grief. I had my heroine face the loss of the one person she held most dear. Alchemy is the glue that holds the series together and any work of fiction touting the noble art cannot ignore one of its most basic goals—to create the elixir of immortality. It was inevitable that I throw the possibility of immortality into the mix, but Bianca is foremost a scientist. She questions what she cannot see or prove by experiment.

She comes very close to creating the elusive elixir, but ultimately she decides that it is not her place to tamper with the natural order. However, there is one experiment that would prove the veracity of the coveted remedy. A cat that has been given the potion becomes her cherished companion. A subtle insight into Bianca's personality becomes clear—she protects that cat as if its life is precious.

The character of Hobs the cat is based on a real Hobbes that shared my life for 17 years. When I discovered that a "hob" was a mischievous house spirit in British folklore, the coincidence became too perfect not to include him. It gives me some comfort to have him in the series. In a sense I have given him immortality, but it remains to be seen whether he, as well as my stories, will endure.

My series also touches on the medical conventions and thoughts of the time. In *Death of an Alchemist,* the second book in the series, I needed an inciting disease for Bianca to think about. I threw a second malady into the mix: a hemorrhagic infection that I based on the Ebola outbreak in 2014. I wanted the reader to experience some of the confusion a Tudor citizen might feel in the face of an

unknown deadly disease. The response to epidemics, the panic and fear, is as commonplace in modern times as it was in the Tudor era.

Ultimately, interest in a subject will spark creativity. My fascination with the Tudor period keeps me thinking about what it was like to live back then. What were the mindsets, the political forces at play shaping this world? When a question demands your attention it leads to more questions. The *what ifs* and juxtapositions crowd into your imagination. Imperative too, is my personal need to understand the emotional turmoil that life throws my way. That discourse is an underlying current that follows me as I write, and it is never more evident than in *Death of an Alchemist*.

MARY LAWRENCE lives in Maine and worked in the medical field for over 25 years before publishing her debut mystery, *The Alchemist's Daughter* (Kensington, 2015). The book was named by *Suspense Magazine* as a "Best Book of 2015" in the historical mystery category. Her articles have appeared in several publications, most notably *Portland Monthly Magazine* and the national news blog The Daily Beast. Book 2 of the Bianca Goddard Mysteries, *Death of an Alchemist*, appeared in February 2016, and *Death at St. Vedast* releases in 2017. Visit her online at www.marylawrencebooks.com.

GRANT McKENZIE

Devil with a Gun

The idea behind *Devil With A Gun*, my second Dixie Flynn mystery, began 20 years before I ever cracked open the laptop and began to write.

I was a young reporter working the Dead Body beat at a feisty metropolitan tabloid, which meant I was responsible for any "interesting" bodies that popped up on the police scanners between midnight and six a.m. During the day I was attending college and running the student newspaper, but nights were me, the police scanners, and an occasional inebriated reporter who had elected to fall asleep at his desk rather than go home.

Strange things can happen in those dark hours, especially when there is a serial rapist running around the city and terrifying a lot of vulnerable women. As a reporter, I felt helpless when scared women would call for updates, wanting to know if the rapist had struck again or if the police had any leads toward ending his violent spree.

I was wet behind the ears, but sounded mature and confident enough to help bring a little calm to their worries.

That in itself was inspiration for my imagination to ponder what I would do if I snooped out who the rapist was before the police did. Was I a law-abiding man of justice or a brutal vigilante of revenge?

It was conflicting thoughts like those that would eventually make me take a one-year leave of absence in my early 20s to dust off my typewriter, buy a ream of fresh paper, and write that first novel. Unfortunately, that novel was never published, and neither were the next four. It wasn't until many years later that my sixth novel, *Switch*, landed me an agent and my first contract with Random House.

While still trying to find my feet in the shifting sands of the publishing world, I actually dusted off that first typewritten manuscript and took another crack at it. The end result was my first Dixie Flynn novel, *Angel With A Bullet*, sold to a publisher two decades after I wrote that first draft.

But, oddly, it wasn't the story of the serial rapist that stuck with me for two decades and inspired *Angel's* sequel, *Devil With A Gun*. Instead, it was a simple classified ad posted in the back of the tabloid on Father's Day.

I had clipped the ad out of the newspaper in the mid-1980s and pasted it in my notebook. The ad was only a few lines long, but its message intrigued me: a woman basically telling her absentee and abusive father to go to hell.

For years to come, that ad nagged at my subconscious as though desperate for its story to be told. I often came across it, yellowed and fading, when I was packing up to move to a new apartment or when

deciding I needed to declutter my boxes of notes, old poetry and unpublished manuscripts.

When I did stumble upon it, I thought about the vulnerable woman who had written the ad, about what it meant to share her pain with strangers, if it gave her strength or more agony, what the father thought when he read it, if he ever read it, etc.

After *Angel With A Bullet* was published by Midnight Ink, I deliberately set out to find the old notebook that contained the ad, knowing it was finally time to bring its story into the light.

Devil With A Gun begins with Dixie, our hard-nosed, quick-witted, crime-reporting heroine—yes, I write the Dixie Flynn novels from a female perspective, just to give the psychiatrists something to talk about—being ordered to write a fluff piece for the newspaper about Father's Day. Naturally, Dixie balks at the suggestion until the paper's librarian shows her an intriguing classified ad.

The five-line ad reads:

> Twenty years ago, you walked out.
> No word, no note. Alive or dead?
> Do you ever think of us? Ever really love us?
> Mother tried and failed; the mess you left.
> I can never forgive.

Now, this isn't the wording used in the original ad, but it is inspired by it.

Since I was beginning to think of how the story would be told, I added certain elements, such as a sibling, the timeline and a reference to the mother. In short, I completely changed it as I realized that my

imagination had added a dozen threads that didn't exist in the original when I went back and re-read it.

The ad had been a seed that took root in my imagination and grew into a twisted, tortured garden of mystery and intrigue.

And I believe that's what writers do. We're like chipmunks who store all these little nuggets of information in our cheeks without really knowing how they may all come together one day to form a feast. In crowds, we like to be invisible because it is there in the shadows and gossamer that we can overhear prized motes of wisdom and embarrassing truths that add life to our characters and storylines.

Devil With A Gun is a long-traveled path away from that original five-line ad in an old tabloid newspaper—just as I am a long-traveled path away from the young kid reporter who first read it—but there was a reason its message stuck with me, and now, finally, its story is told.

GRANT McKENZIE is the internationally published author of five edge-of-your-seat thrillers, plus an ongoing mystery series set in San Francisco. His latest novel, *Speak The Dead*, was named one of the Best Books of 2015 by *The Strand Magazine*. His riveting thrillers are available from Polis Books. Under the pen name M. C. Grant, he writes the Shamus-short-listed Dixie Flynn series from Midnight Ink. As a multi-award-winning journalist, Grant has worked in virtually every area of the newspaper business. He lives in Victoria, Canada. Find out more about Grant at www.grantmckenzie.net.

JOHN MACKIE

The Thorn Savage Novels

I was a somewhat naïve young man of 23 when sworn into the New York Police Department in February of 1968. In only six months I would be quite worldly…and almost 35.

The baptism by fire started in early April 1968, with the assassination of Martin Luther King. That long hot summer dragged on with twelve-hour tours of duty—no days off—dealing with ghetto riots, anti-war demonstrations and, in general, constant civil unrest. So began my long career as a street cop in New York City. And, too, so began my long—sometimes unrequited—love affair with the mean streets of Gotham and their quirky, sometimes outrageous, and very often dangerous denizens.

An inveterate people watcher and amateur human behaviorist, I always paid strict attention to the actions and motives of the weirdos and criminals with whom I came in contact. Some were truly a study: always opportunistic, ever enigmatic, but never boring. Too, I always empathized with the victims of crime. I understood their

anger and, most of all, their pain at having been violated. Beyond that, I always watched and paid very strict attention to the varying styles and attitudes of my fellow police officers. And, most importantly, I kept close tabs on myself: my perceptions, my attitudes, and my views of the world around me. My, how they all changed!

In those many years as a New York City cop I accumulated countless stories and anecdotes. But I also discovered the elements necessary to create authentic and believable situations and characters. All this was experienced firsthand and often made me think, "Ya know, I oughta write a book." But, of course, doesn't everybody think that sometime during their lives? Most do—very few ever act on it.

After the NYPD retired me due to injuries sustained in the line of duty, I suffered through a long period of separation anxiety from "The Job," which led to a full-blown case of clinical depression that almost proved fatal. I had lost not only my job, but also my identity. I was no longer "John the Cop." Truth is, I really did not know who I was. I was wandering, aimless. I needed to somehow reinvent myself.

Thankfully, that old thought returned, recurring with ever more frequency as time went on: "You really oughta write a book." One day, with a single-minded determination to see my novel become published by a legitimate publishing house, I sat down at my old IBM Selectric and started. I wrote each and every day, year in and year out. I wore out my Selectric and a Canon word processor, and put lots of mileage on my first HP computer. The most difficult thing to master during those early years of writing was KYAITC, my acronym for "keep your ass in the chair."

I eventually completed a full-length novel and set about the task of finding an agent to represent it. That was painful . . . and fruitless.

After 62 letters of rejection, I had to decide where to go. Do I give up writing, do I continue rewriting the first novel *ad infinitum*, hoping to get it so perfect that it will finally be accepted … or do I bite the bullet and start all over again with a completely new novel?

Hard choice, to be sure. That first novel was the baby that I had agonized over and polished for years. How could I just walk away? I opted to accept the fact that a first novel is only a learning process. It tells you if you have the grit to keep your ass in the chair and grind out a novel-length story that has a beginning, middle, and end. Now, I resigned myself to start all over and write my *real* first novel. More years of keeping my ass in the chair.

After ten years of writing overall, I finally connected with my first novel, *Manhattan South*, which was published by what was then called Penguin Putnam (as I write this many acquisitions and mergers later, it calls itself merely The Penguin Group). Then came the next four in the five-book series: *Manhattan North, East Side, West Side*, and *To Kill a Queen*. I guess I don't have to tell you, they're all about cops, victims, and bad guys in the land of New York City.

The main protagonist in my series of novels is Detective Sergeant Thornton MacLanahan Savage. Savage supervises an ensemble cast of detectives at the Manhattan South Homicide Unit. Fifty years old and a widower, in many ways Thorn Savage is Everyman. But in other ways, particularly in his life's calling, he is exceptional. The son of a cop, the brother of a cop, he is naturally gifted for police work, born into it much the way I suspect that great musicians are born with that natural ear, to hear in perfect pitch.

Along with the creation of a solid plot, the real challenge for me and, I believe, the most important element in novel writing was

developing my characters into authentic, three-dimensional, believable, and likable people. For that, I tapped into my vivid recall of some of the men and women I worked with during my time in The Job. These were real people, with real likes and dislikes, real prejudices, and their own real bogeymen. Though some were pure as the driven snow, others liked the sauce a bit too much, some were degenerate gamblers, and still others hopeless womanizers. But these were real people, ordinary people, doing heroic and extraordinary work.

Savage himself is an amalgamation of several people, including myself, who were hard-working, totally dedicated, and of unquestioned integrity. That is not to say that Savage and his team are above bending a rule here and there in order to see justice prevail, for they can and often do just that. Such was police work during my era, and I suspect that some of that continues to this day. I hope so.

There is no question that writing a novel is a solitary and often lonely pursuit. But by undertaking the daunting process, and becoming entrenched in my stories and the lives of my characters, I was able to move on in my own life. Best of all, I had re-invented myself. I was no longer John the Cop. I had become John the Writer.

Born and raised in Brooklyn, **JOHN MACKIE** grew up imagining himself wearing a Dodger uniform and playing third base. When the fantasy of youth faded into reality, he became a New York City policeman, discovering that he would rather be a New York City cop than a third baseman for any ball club. . . well, almost. During his 17 years with the NYPD, he was decorated over 30 times and

awarded the prestigious Medal of Valor. Since work-related injuries forced him into early retirement, he has published five Thorn Savage novels. John now makes his home in Florida. Find out more at www.mackiej.com.

EDITH MAXWELL

The Country Store Mysteries

In the Country Store Mysteries (which I write as Maddie Day), chef and carpenter Robbie Jordan remodels a country store full of antique cookware in fictional South Lick, Indiana, and turns it into a local breakfast and lunch establishment called Pans 'N Pancakes. She doesn't plan to have murder on the menu. But small-town secrets and bitter rivalries put sand in the batter and before Robbie knows it, her new life is a lot more complicated than she had expected.

I have lived in Massachusetts for 30-some years and am a native Californian. So why Indiana? Well, I spent five happy years earning my doctorate at the flagship Indiana University campus in Bloomington, a university that generations of Maxwells attended and of which my great-great-great grandfather was one of the founders. (Also: my great-grandfather was first dean of the IU Medical school, my grandfather was captain of the IU basketball team in 1916, and my own father was an undergrad there.) To imagine IU Bloomington,

think huge university in a small town. You can walk or ride a bike everywhere. People are friendlier and talk more slowly than in the Northeast. And neighboring Brown County is as hilly and pretty as Vermont.

The seed for this series was a fellow student in the IU Linguistics Ph.D. program in the late 1970s. He dropped out of the program and, with his girlfriend, bought a run-down country store in the town of Story in Brown County. They fixed it up into a breakfast restaurant as well as a bed-and-breakfast establishment. On the menu were whole-wheat banana walnut pancakes, which I make to this day and which figure prominently in my books. The Story Inn still exists, although my friends don't own it any longer.

When I was imagining how this series might play out, I conjured up a 27-year-old woman named Robbie Jordan who grew up in Santa Barbara, California. Three years after Robbie moves near her mom's sister Adele in Brown County to work as a chef, Robbie's carpenter mom dies suddenly. Robbie uses her savings and a small inheritance to acquire the country store. Robbie's mom had taught her the trade, so she renovates the store herself and turns the sign on her dream to *OPEN*. Robbie's a cyclist and a puzzle master, both of which serve her well in solving crimes.

Book One, *Flipped for Murder*, came out in October 2015. In it, Stella, the mayor's difficult assistant, is found dead the night of the store's grand reopening with one of Robbie's trademark cheesy biscuits stuffed into her mouth, and the future of Robbie's new life is threatened. Is the killer the competitor country-store owner who wants to sabotage Robbie's project? The former mayor who thinks Stella rigged the election? The new mayor with a tricky past, whom

Stella was blackmailing? Or someone else? Robbie uses her skills as a champion puzzle solver to salvage her business and help the small-town police put the murderer behind bars.

In Book Two, *Grilled for Murder* (May 2016), Robbie's getting ready to decorate the store for Christmas. She finds a body behind the pickle barrel the morning after a party she catered in her store—a body apparently clobbered with cookware—and the police suspect Robbie's friend Phil, who closed up after the party. To clear Phil and calm her customers, Robbie needs to step out from behind the counter and find the real killer in short order.

I'm having a great time writing these books, and have now hit "Send" on *When the Grits Hit the Fan*!

Agatha-nominated and Amazon best-selling author **EDITH MAXWELL** writes the Quaker Midwife Mysteries and the Local Foods Mysteries; the Country Store Mysteries (as Maddie Day); and the Lauren Rousseau Mysteries (as Tace Baker), as well as award-winning short crime fiction. Maxwell lives north of Boston with her beau and three cats, and blogs with the other Wicked Cozy Authors. You can find her on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and at www.edithmaxwell.com.

CAMILLE MINICHINO

The Periodic Table Mysteries

I'd had the idea for years. Ever since Sue Grafton's *A is for Alibi* hit the stores in the early 80s, I'd realized that a guaranteed 26 books was nothing compared to the 100-plus possibilities I had at my fingertips as a scientist. The alphabet? A piddling list. The periodic table—the list of chemical elements—was where it was at, and it was still growing.

For the next 10 years or so, I told everyone within earshot about my great plan—to write a mystery series based on the periodic table: *The Hydrogen Murder*, *The Helium Murder*, and so on, up to the last atomic number recorded. I talked about my series as if I'd already written it.

I see this now as a common phenomenon—like Dorothy Parker's "I hate writing, but I love having written."

Eventually I stopped using my computer for endless games of Yahtzee and solitaire and started my first novel. There was no question about who would be my protagonist, what her background

would be, what career she'd have. No question either about the setting.

Enter Gloria Lamerino, Italian-American physicist from Revere Beach, Massachusetts. In other words, me, except for the part about being smart and brave enough to take on a murder case. Gloria needed a connection to a cop, who'd look like a cross between Robert De Niro and Al Pacino, with the heft of Paul Sorvino. And she'd need an interesting place to live—how about the abode of one of my first boyfriends, a mortuary intern whose apartment was above a funeral parlor? Imagine the fun of following Gloria as she creeps down to the laundry area, on the same floor as the embalming room.

This was how it all added up: A Periodic Table Mystery Series was a perfect opportunity to present my view of females in STEM, the curriculum focusing on science, technology, engineering and mathematics; my knowledge of Italian scientists and Italian-American culture; and my love of the town I grew up in, the site of the country's first "theme park" and the first public beach in the United States. *Uber*ambitious! And a poor example for my current writing students when I warn them not to cram too many themes and "messages" into one book.

But I was young, barely 60 years old.

The first eight books of the series wrote themselves. Each element of the table is fascinating, with great potential for good or evil. Lithium, for example, can be used in manufacturing and in medicine; it also reacts violently with water, forming a highly flammable gas and corrosive fumes. In *The Lithium Murder*, a janitor at a lab overhears secrets concerning the dangers of lithium waste disposal and is murdered when he tries to blackmail the researchers.

My sorry job was to explore the possibilities of crime and criminals surrounding each element. The worst part was sometimes turning scientists into killers. Otherwise, after a few books, readers would realize, "Well, we know it's not the physicist." I managed to spread the wealth of criminal pathology around various occupations.

By the time I reached *The Oxygen Murder*, my agent asked, "Do you have any other ideas?" I quickly learned that this question was code for "Enough of the elements; give us something more popular."

I had to acknowledge that not everyone was addicted to the splendor of the periodic table and mined the rest of my life for ideas and potential series. My lifelong hobby as a miniaturist gave birth to Gerry Porter and her 10-year-old granddaughter, Maddie, in the Miniature Mysteries (published under the pen name Margaret Grace). When the code came up again, I tapped into my tenure as a college professor with the Professor Sophie Knowles Mysteries (writing as Ada Madison). And most recently, my brief stint as a postal worker led me to Postmaster Cassie Miller, who I write about as Jean Flowers. All four series are ongoing in one form or another, either as novels or short stories.

After the Periodic Table Mysteries, I learned my lesson about real versus fictional towns, and set all subsequent series in locales that I made up and could populate as I wished.

Here's what convinced me. When I learned that *The Hydrogen Murder* had been reviewed in a local paper, I was concerned about how my portrayal of my hometown would be received—after all, I hadn't lived there for 20 years and though my visits were frequent and my memories vivid, I was no longer a resident.

Would the locals resent the way I presented their city? Would I get facts wrong, despite conscientious research?

I'd been careful not to take too many liberties with the setting. I'd included flashbacks to the old Revere Beach Boulevard where I'd spent my youth, and felt they would stand up to scrutiny.

I did have to make one change, necessary for the series, and that was to place a research lab on the outskirts of town, near where the city dump was located in real life. The fictional lab employed the crowd of scientists and engineers that I needed for my stories.

Imagine my delight when the local reporter praised my sense of place and the way I'd captured Revere. Except for "one big error," he wrote.

Uh-oh. Had my heroine gone the wrong way down Tuttle Street? Had I put the city hall on the wrong side of Broadway? The post office too close to the police station? Nothing like that. Much worse. "Minichino says there's a Starbucks in Revere and there is no Starbucks in Revere," the article read.

Imagine that.

I know I'll never master the sensibilities of folks in a real town. So don't look on any map for a Lincoln Point, California (the Miniature Mysteries), a Henley, Massachusetts (the Professor Sophie Knowles Mysteries), or a North Ashcot, Massachusetts (the Postmistress Mysteries).

I continue to write stories set in Revere, but only short ones, where I don't stray too far into the local traffic.

Coming soon: *The Magnesium Murder*, number 12. Only 106 to go!

CAMILLE MINICHINO is a retired physicist-turned-writer. When her first book, *Nuclear Waste Management Abstracts*, was not a bestseller, she turned to mystery fiction. She has written more than 20 novels and many articles and short stories. Find out more about Camille and her books at www.minichino.com.

TOBY NEAL

The Lei Crime Series

How do you keep a long-running mystery series fresh, book after book? It's been my goal that each story in the Lei Crime Series would intrigue, surprise, and inform readers in a new way.

I'll use *Bitter Feast,* the "final" book in the series, as an example. The particular inspirations that shaped *Bitter Feast* ran the gamut from the virtual—the vibrant storytelling of the Lei Crime Series Kindle World—to the distinctly down-to-earth—the farming part of the farm-to-table movement.

That movement is something I've been "biting into" here on Maui for years now, with a personal interest in organic farming and a love of delicious food. *Bitter Feast*'s storyline developed around the idea of a murder in a fine dining restaurant on Maui that's a "feast" of possible motives, with jealousy, passion and revenge topping the menu. Lieutenant Michael Stevens, usually my secondary protagonist, takes the lead on an investigation peopled with a host of familiar

characters from the series. They chime in from their perspectives, each contributing essential information to one of the most complex cases Stevens has encountered—but that's nothing compared to imminent parenthood with his wife Lei, who'd rather be packing a gun than a diaper bag. I think I may be the first crime writer to weave a home birth into the plot!

Nine points of view move this story forward. Writing a mystery from nine points of view is not for the faint of heart. What was I thinking, taking that on for my capstone story? Well, I thought that it was going to be impossible to top the nonstop blistering action and innovative point-of-view usage of *Red Rain*, the previous book. I needed to go in a completely different direction, and end the series in an emotionally satisfying way. After a month or two of being stumped, the licensed fan fiction of the Lei Crime Series Kindle World novellas provided an idea.

These stories are written by other authors using my characters with my licensing permission, and you can find them on Amazon. It's such an honor to have my own Kindle World! There are several genres represented, and close to fifty stories, with more being added all the time.

Many of these novellas take peripheral or secondary characters in my series and expand upon them. Reading the Kindle World novellas, I realized afresh what a colorful, multicultural cast of characters populates the series, many interesting enough to be main characters. I decided to take on a new writing challenge and show this story through the points of view of lesser, but still fascinating, characters.

It is certainly more difficult doing a book this way. While the idea for the structure of the book came from the Kindle World, I returned to earth—Hawaiian earth, that is—to immerse myself in the particulars of its setting and central mystery puzzle. It's that immersion—in local places, culture, and issues—that create the depth and authenticity my readers have come to expect. Talking to people with deep first-hand knowledge is invaluable in getting beyond mere facts and into the heart of each book.

That's why, for each topic I've tackled in the series, from ocean conservation (*Bone Hook*) to identity theft and art smuggling (*Black Jasmine*) to arson (*Fire Beach*), I've found a local "expert" to help ground my research.

There's no better example of how this works than an 8 a.m. interview I was lucky enough to have this spring with Maui organic farming hero and chef, James "Kimo" Simpliciano, who inspired the character Teo Benitez in *Bitter Feast*.

When I arrived, Kimo hopped down from a backhoe and met me in the rich slurry of water and mud at the base of the biggest pile of compost I'd ever seen, smoking with interior combustion. "That's how much compost it takes to break up this kind of soil," he said, gesturing. "I accept all this rubbish material from landscapers and we grind it up. It's a slow process because I'm building the soil, and that takes time."

Kimo had an enduring quality that reminded me of the sun-hardened monkeypod logs we passed as we walked along the red dust road of his farm, carved with sweat and tears out of former sugarcane land. Far-seeing eyes hidden under a billed cap, Kimo spoke softly, each sentence distilled.

"It's hard." His shoulders were tight with the burden of responsibility and heavy work as we looked across ten acres slowly greening into paradise, set jewel-like in the gold of arid, depleted land gone fallow all around us. "But look. A *Pueo!* The farm's become a sanctuary for native plants and wildlife." He pointed, and I saw the diurnal native Hawaiian owl dip and dart over his land, buff and silver against the deep blue of the endless Lahaina sky, making me gasp with its grace. "Our day is blessed," he said. Seeing the owl is considered good luck.

Kimo kneels to show me a baby *wiliwili* tree, an oddly-shaped, highly endangered tree endemic to the area. *Wiliwili, ulu* (breadfruit) and other native trees grow all over the property.

"Where do you get these?" I asked, surprised by the number of bright, healthy seedlings.

"I foraged the seeds." I could just see Kimo in my mind's eye, hat drawn low, boots laced high, hiking through the arid scrub to find the *wiliwili*, a canvas bag for seeds looped across his chest like a modern-day Johnny Appleseed. That's Kimo at work. "Sustainable" is one of his primary values, and foraging and barter are ways he can coax plenty from dust.

Remembering his grandfather, who came from the Philippines to work the cane, Kimo told me, "He'd bring me to work, and sit me on a stump to watch the big cranes and those huge trucks, clanking with chains. Even then, I wanted to see the land go back to the way it was before sugarcane." He touched his heart with a fist, conveying without words a deep longing that encompassed this barren, arid landscape, and made a promise of what it could become once again.

Looking at the land through Kimo's eyes made its importance, and also its peril, newly real to me. Whatever of this island that hasn't been sold, developed, or made into "gentleman estate farms" lies fallow in the wake of pineapple and sugar. Another 33,000 acres fell into limbo in September 2016, which saw the very last sugar harvest on Maui. On other islands, sugar and pineapple have given way to development.

We're all worried about what will fill that void here, and lawmakers and citizen groups are agitating to make sure the land continues to be used for agriculture. But Kimo knows more than most how challenging it will be to get something to grow in soil that has been chemically flogged to produce for decades—and he is one of the very few pioneering totally natural, organic agriculture practices on Maui.

"How we grow food matters," he told me. "It's worth it to build the foundation right so that food is healthy at the cell level."

I've been joining Kimo's efforts in my own small way as I work my home organic garden, compost pile in the corner of the yard and all. How we grow food *does* matter, and sometimes it's as much a matter of the heart as it is of the head. By imbuing the farmer character in *Bitter Feast* with some of Kimo's warmth and knowledge, I hoped to bring the vision and passion of farmers like him to life even for those who may never have the good fortune to visit the islands.

I've tried hard to keep every book in the series fresh and surprising, not an easy task fifteen books in (including my companion books starring side characters). I believe I achieved that in *Bitter Feast* as well, and hope these examples inspire your writing (and reading) journey.

Author **TOBY NEAL** grew up on the island of Kaua`i in Hawaii. After a few stretches of exile to pursue education, the islands have been home for the last sixteen years. Neal's career in clinical social work informs the depth and complexity of the characters in her books. Neal is the author of more than a dozen novels in the mystery and young adult genres and the bestselling Lei Crime Series, which debuted in 2011. In 2015 Amazon launched the Lei Crime Kindle World, which allows authors to build licensed fan fiction upon Neal's works, and she's sold over a million books collectively. Neal's books have won the 2015 Independent Publisher Book ("IPPY") Award in Best Mystery/Thriller for *Twisted Vine* and the 2015 National Indie Excellence® Award in the Best Multicultural Novel category for *Torch Ginger*, among other honors. You can find her at www.tobyneal.net.

CHRIS NICKSON

Dark Briggate Blues

Where does a book come from? Do we as authors simply pluck ideas out of the mysterious ether? Or is there more to it? It's a question we're all asked, sometimes too often. The answers can occasionally be quite stumbling.

But in some instances the genesis of a book is very easy to explain. It certainly is in the case of *Dark Briggate Blues*, my 1950s noir set in Leeds, England. The initial process was remarkably straightforward.

I'd been reading my way through Raymond Chandler's novels and short stories and, of course, that wonderful essay *The Simple Art of Murder*. Add to that a large handful of Ross Macdonald's Lew Archer books (but skip the overrated Hammett). In other words, a sampling of some of the best "hardboiled" American detective writing of a certain era. Great stuff, but once I'd finished, a question came into my head: what would 1950s *English* provincial noir be like?

Perhaps the closest I'd come to any was Graham Greene's *Brighton Rock*, but that didn't hit the spot. A friend suggested Craig Russell's books. Entertaining, but set in Scotland with a Canadian main character. Not exactly what I was after.

My solution was the one that would occur to any novelist: if you want to know something, write it yourself. I had a period, I had a place. It couldn't be anywhere else but Leeds. Not only because I've written about the city in the 1730s and 1890s, but because it's one I know, and from my own childhood I remember it very shortly after the period.

Simple, right? I thought it would be easy enough. Which goes to show how wrong assumptions can be. The hard work hadn't even begun. I had the idea. Now I had to make it work.

I decided to set the novel in 1954, the year I was born, naïvely believing that the mere fact I'd been breathing meant I'd taken in the era by osmosis, or with my mother's milk.

Wrong.

I could incorporate some things from my own life—the office my protagonist, Dan Markham, has is actually the office my father had at the time. His flat is in the same house where I spent the first year of my life, and the house where he goes to investigate a wife who might be straying is the house we moved into. The rest all came from research. The idea was good: an enquiry agent (the British term for private investigator at the time) who's catapulted into something beyond his expectations that challenges his skills. I had the germ; making it into a flower wasn't going to be easy.

Research is the novelist's friend, of course. While the 1950s might seem very close, it's really a lifetime away. In Britain back then, very

few people had phones at home. Most didn't own fridges or TVs. More and more people were buying cars, but they were still the minority. Entertainment? The wireless, the gramophone, and it was still the golden age of the cinema. Nightclubs, of course, and dance bands—this was before the era of pop music and the teenager.

A whole world to discover.

I definitely wanted a fairly young main character. Dan Markham needed to be about 25. Too young to have served in World War II and carry that baggage, but still old enough to have had some experience of life and develop some skills. Youthful enough to be underestimated, yet wily enough to surprise.

That meant National Service when he turned 18. I decided that Markham had been born in 1929. He was ten when the war began, old enough to follow it, for it to be a part of him. Scoring well on tests at the start of National Service, he was selected for Military Intelligence and sent to Germany. Hamburg, mostly, but also some trips to Berlin, which was then deep in the heart of East Germany, a city divided between the British, French, Americans, and Russians: Spy Central. He'd have been schooled in a number of tricks, code, and the like. He'd have learned to use his wits, even if those skills had rusted.

Since I have a love of 1950s jazz, I saw no reason for Markham not to share it. In Germany he'd met a PFC, a Private First Class, from Ohio. Oscar had schooled him in jazz and brought him records from the PX. The music was hard to find in England back then, as Markham discovered. Just one shop in London with an extensive stock, but they did do mail order.

But, and this was the biggest revelation of my research, Leeds had a thriving jazz club, Studio 20 on New Briggate, run by a chap named Bob Barclay. It's well documented in photos, and a natural home away from home for Markham. Once that piece fell into my lap, I knew this book simply had to be. It felt ordained.

And that's the way it can often be when a book is taking shape. That thing that makes it seem inevitable, a gift from the gods that you dare not refuse in case they withdraw their favors (yes, superstition plays a part, too).

So now I know what 50s English provincial noir is like. But the story doesn't quite end there. There's a little tale behind the sequel, too. At the launch for *Dark Briggate Blues*, I talked to a woman whose father was an enquiry agent in Leeds in the 1950s. His business partner, it was rumored, brought people out of East Germany during the Cold War. Then, while I was researching a factory that built bombers during the War, a friend told me of a shocking discovery his uncle had made there in the 1950s. And finally I learned about the utility tunnels that run under part of Leeds.

Once again the gods were tapping me on the shoulder. Time to write the sequel, *The New Eastgate Swing*, the voices said. And once again I had no choice but to follow….

CHRIS NICKSON was born and raised in Leeds. He has a love affair with the city, exploring it in fiction over several different periods. A crime writer and music journalist, he spent 30 years in the US, many in Seattle, before returning to the UK, finally settling contentedly just a mile from where he grew up. In novels

he writes the places and people he feels in his bones. With music he prefers the paths that aren't as well trodden, that lead to other parts of the globe. Find out more about Chris's work at www.chrisnickson.co.uk.

ANN PARKER

The Silver Rush Mysteries

I was born and raised in California, so I'm a California girl. But my parents, my grandparents, and some of my uncles and aunts are from Colorado. I visited the state a lot as a child and was always drawn to it. At the family reunion in 1997, my Uncle Walt, who has done a lot of family history and genealogy research, happened to mention that my paternal grandmother was raised in Leadville, an old Colorado town set in the heart—and the height—of the Rockies. She loved to tell stories, but I'd never heard her talk about Leadville at all.

"What's Leadville?" I asked. Walt replied, "It was just the biggest silver rush in the world, and a hell-raising town, really fascinating history." By now, I was intrigued. He continued, "I know you want to do some fiction writing. You should research Leadville and set a book there."

Back home, I did some research…and my uncle was right! The more I read about Leadville, the more fascinated I became. The silver

rush there hit its peak around 1879, about 30 years after the Gold Rush, which as a California schoolchild I'd learned a lot about (whether I wanted to or not). The town and the region were beautiful, but the Leadville of the Silver Rush was, as my uncle had said, a hell-raising town. Like most boomtowns, it attracted all kinds: people from all over the country and the world, from the credulous to the criminal. There was no way infrastructure or law enforcement could keep up with the huge influx of people thinking they were going to strike it rich at 10,000 feet in the Rockies, where winter lasts nine months out of the year. It felt like the perfect place for fictional exploration.

But what was I going to do with it? What kind of book did I want to write? The path forward became clearer one day when I was talking to my good friend, the mystery writer Camille Minichino. "Ann, you read mysteries all the time. Why don't you make it a mystery?" she asked me.

Though I've been a voracious reader ever since I was a kid and I've always loved mysteries, it had never occurred to me that I could write one. But the idea made sense. At that point I had to go back and look closely at mystery structure, how the books are put together. I had always read them for pleasure: absorbing some of their craft, maybe, but not looking at it with a conscious or analytic eye.

I considered a male protagonist but decided against that pretty quickly. I had watched a lot of Westerns when I was a child—it was the timeframe of *Have Gun Will Travel*, *Paladin*, and particularly *The Wild Wild West*. But the thing about the Westerns, which I recognized even when I was young, was that the men had all the fun, all the adventures. Where were the women? They were the wallpaper,

the faces in the crowd. That struck me as incredibly unfair. If I was going to write mysteries, I was going to let the girls have some fun, too.

As I was thinking about that, I was reading Dianne Day's Fremont Jones series. Fremont Jones had a spark that I liked. I found myself musing something along the lines of, *Suppose you took the spunkiness of Fremont Jones and turned it darker…wrote someone who took a wrong turn somewhere and who was willing to walk that line between right and wrong, legal and illegal*. From that "what if" I wove my protagonist Inez Stannert, a saloon owner with a complex life and history. I didn't want her perfect, and I didn't want her a spunky young thing. I wanted her to be a woman who'd had some experience in life, and who was willing to compromise her moral standards somewhat when she thought it would help her friends or protect her family. That felt more interesting, and more realistic, too.

It worked to my advantage that women had a lot of opportunity in the 19th-century West. Women entrepreneurs might still get looked on askance, but there was a sense that everyone, not just women, was stepping outside of "normal" or traditional roles. You could change your life, reinvent yourself, start over—often, that's precisely what people were coming to the West to do. They might already have come from Europe to America to try something new. And if that venture didn't work out? You can almost sense them thinking, *All right. We're just going to move a little further West and try again*. I immediately loved that sense of open possibilities.

As I've written the books in what became my Silver Rush series, I've done a lot of research on the silver rush, Colorado, Leadville, and the period generally. Don and Jean Griswold's *History of Leadville*

and Lake County, Colorado has been an incredible resource: thousands of pages on Leadville, ordered year by year.

I've also picked up lots of intriguing bits and pieces for the novels, like a magpie. I'll be moving along, I'll notice something, I'll go, *Ooohhh, shiny, I'm going to tuck that aside for later.* One example—which helped inspire my newest novel in the series, *What Gold Buys*—was an email from a very kind woman in England who had a relative or family friend who had come to Leadville hoping to strike it rich during the timeframe of my novels. The poor fellow died in Colorado and was shipped home in a glass coffin. Who wouldn't be fascinated by that?

I still don't know if it was a coffin made entirely of glass. But that got me thinking about what happens when you die far from home, and about death in the 19th-century West generally. My novel before *What Gold Buys*, titled *Mercury's Rise*, had been about tuberculosis, a real scourge at the time. It seemed logical to move from illness to death—how people saw it, what they believed happened afterward. Death was so ever-present in the 19th century. You could step on a nail and die, or perish from what are now totally curable illnesses—people were constantly grieving. So I understand the drive to believe you can connect with someone who is gone that gave rise to the spiritualism movement. Spiritualism is dramatic, rife with fictional possibilities, and women were very prominent within the movement. The characters of fortuneteller and psychic Drina Gizzi and spiritualist Françoise Alexander in *What Gold Buys* grew out of all that.

Drina's daughter Antonia came to life from a similar small detail. I read about a Leadville newspaper giving the boys who sold newspapers in the era handsome new uniforms. That got me thinking

about other newsies, children who were part of the period's scenery. Somehow Antonia Gizzi, a young girl who dresses up as a boy to earn money, walked in to my story. She was angry as heck. I found myself asking "Why are you so angry?" and her role developed from there.

As I've written the Silver Rush novels, they've grown to feel more like books in a saga rather than just mysteries—the cast of recurring characters has moved beyond Inez alone, and the world of the books beyond just Leadville. In the end, one of the things that makes me glad I chose to write a mystery series is that allows me to create my own world. I enjoy the puzzle element, but what I love is the way I can make my fictional world behave as I want—sometimes even write in a sense of justice that you don't always get in the real world, in 1879 or today.

ANN PARKER earned degrees in physics and English literature before falling into a career as a science writer. The only thing more fun for her than slipping oblique Yeats references into a fluid dynamics article is delving into the past. Her Silver Rush historical mystery series is set in the silver boomtown of Leadville, Colorado, in the early 1880s and has been picked as a "Booksellers Favorite" by the Mountains and Plains Independent Booksellers Association. A member of Mystery Writers of America and Women Writing the West, Ann lives with her husband and an uppity cat near Silicon Valley, whence they have weathered numerous high-tech boom-and-bust cycles. Find Ann online at www.annparker.net.

ELIOT PATTISON

The Inspector Shan Mysteries

All great fiction starts with wonder. The best of novels have magic between the lines, an inexplicable essence that transcends character and setting. I realized this years ago and resolved never to commence a novel until I found the spark of wonder that would bring it to life. This is what animates my writing: exploring the spark that keeps me passionately committed to writing the next page.

Steinbeck meant this, I believe, when he wrote about the "aching urge of the writer to convey something he feels important." For me, though, the best description came from Robert Frost, writing of a different genre; a great poem, Frost said, "begins with a lump in the throat." I would rather stare at a blank pad—yes, my first drafts are still in longhand—for hours than to begin to write without that passion. Writers who haven't tapped their particular passion can never expect readers to react passionately to their words.

I am fortunate enough to pen successful series in two remarkable settings, occupied Tibet and pre-Revolutionary America, where with a little probing I can always unlock a new box of wonders. This means I am committed to making my novels a journey of discovery for my readers—but first I must make that journey myself. Long ago, therefore, I rejected the adage that novelists must write about what they know. An author's existing knowledge may provide a foundation but the structure he or she builds on it should be as new and fresh to the writer as to the reader.

Years ago I sat in a temple in China and watched a Chinese policeman pound the back of a meditating Tibetan monk with his baton. That brief encounter immediately triggered rage and pity, but it lingered in my mind's eye for years, through many treks on several continents, and eventually I realized that its real lesson wasn't about violence but about the incredible devotion that shrugged off the violence. As I learned more about the remarkable land at the roof of the planet I began to see that many Tibetans weren't just shrugging off the repression, they were shrugging off the weight of the modern world. It was this new sense of wonder that sparked my Inspector Shan novels, each one of which overlays mystery with an exploration of how the human spirit can prevail against the darkest adversities.

My latest book in the series, *Soul of the Fire*, takes up one of the most wrenching aspects of that struggle, self-immolations by Tibetan protesters. There is an abject horror about those deaths and the way Beijing deals with them, but beyond that horror is a message of reverence and heroism. This is a disturbing world to pull readers

into, and an uncomfortable place to linger, making *Soul of the Fire* the most challenging of my Shan books to write.

To keep my readers engaged after stepping into my novel's world, I weave layers of mystery around each of my primary characters. The threads I work with derive from the "culture" of each character—including not only Buddhist tradition, the soulless world of Communist officialdom, and the ancient animistic religion of Tibet, but also the sharply contrasting culture of the Western industrial world. These are elements that keep the journey intriguing for me and, hopefully, my readers, pushing all of us toward new discovery. Is murder different for a Buddhist who steadfastly believes in reincarnation than it is for an American brought up in an eye-for-an-eye justice system? What happens when the contemplative, philosophic Confucian collides with a professional persecutor of religions? These characters have stark, irreconcilable differences, meaning there is no end to the tension among my cast and their goals.

My recurring characters add another vital dimension to my writing process. Like old friends, they rise up out of the page to join me as companions on the journey of each book. I have grown so close to them that it sometimes feels like they are whispering over my shoulder. If I reach an impasse I will sometimes pull out the private, evolving biography I maintain for each of them and supplement it with new aspects of their past lives. Those imagined details often don't appear in my novels, but they bring fresh life to my characters and the process always jump-starts my muse. Such exercises push me toward unanticipated horizons—but a mystery writer should never be shy about embracing the unexpected. My characters and

the worlds they inhabit abound with questions—and I never want to answer them all.

ELIOT PATTISON is the author of eight Inspector Shan mysteries, most lately *Soul of the Fire. The Skull Mantra,* which debuted the series, won the Edgar Award and was a finalist for the Gold Dagger. He is also the author of the Bone Rattler mystery series, set in the mid-18th century, and the postapocalyptic mystery novel *Ashes of the Earth*. An international lawyer by training, Pattison is a world traveler who has spoken and written extensively on international issues. Pattison resides in rural Pennsylvania with his wife, three children, two horses, and two dogs on a colonial-era farm. For more information on the author and books, visit www.eliotpattison.com.

MICHAEL RANSOM

The Ripper Gene

People often ask me, "What was the inspiration for your novel *The Ripper Gene*?" In podcasts and interviews I've had the chance to mention that the genesis of main character Agent Lucas Madden's backstory—namely, his mother's untimely death one Halloween night during his youth—was actually based on a real Halloween night experience from my own childhood that I later fictionalized. In this anthology, however, I'll relay the deeper, overall inspiration for the scientific premise of *The Ripper Gene*, which propels the novel from its opening chapter to its conclusion.

As a young scientist in the late 90s, I happened to browse an article in *Science* magazine that described a gene with variants associated with increased aggression. Being a neuroscience article it wasn't in my own chosen field at the time, but I found that I couldn't stop reading. The gene—monoamine oxidase A (MAO-A), or the so-called "warrior gene"—was responsible for the synthesis of several

different neurotransmitter precursors in the brain. When it's inactivated (due to rare DNA variants found in the general population), individuals have trouble controlling their aggression, and in some cases exhibit higher propensity for anti-social behavior and violent crime.

I recall wondering back then whether other such genes would eventually turn up. At the time of that article's publication, the so-called next-generation sequencing (NGS) methodologies that my own laboratories use today—instruments that can sequence all 3.2 billion nucleotides of an individual's human genome once every 30 minutes or so—had not yet even come into existence. In fact, the very first cobbled-together human genome, requiring more than a decade of effort across thousands of scientists and hundreds of millions of dollars, had still not yet been sequenced. *That* didn't happen until 2003, fifty years after the discovery of the DNA double helix by Watson and Crick.

But as a young pharmacogeneticist I knew nevertheless that the day was eventually coming when we would sequence the entire human genome. And when it did, I wondered whether we (the scientific community) would ever get to the point of understanding the complete set of genetic variants that predispose individuals to violence. In fact, I wondered whether we'd ever identify an optimal set of genes that, when altered in just the right pattern within an individual, would constitute a genetic "perfect storm" and predispose such an unfortunate individual to a far higher likelihood of becoming a psychopath, or even a serial killer.

At the time, I dropped the article into the deep recesses of my mind (well, I suppose the depth of the recesses of my mind is actually

debatable—perhaps shallow would be the better descriptor), duly noted the publication and moved on. After all, I was mainly a cancer researcher and while the article was intriguing and compelling, it wasn't in my line of work.

But I found that I couldn't stop thinking about that finding. Indeed, other genes with variants linked to aggression and psychopathy have turned up since. There are now close to two thousand research articles reporting links between various genetic polymorphisms and aggression or violence. Some of the better-characterized (and more likely to be valid) associations include genes involved in dopamine signaling, serotonin signaling, dopamine transport, serotonin reuptake and other types of brain-specific neurotransmitters. Interestingly, many of the violence-associated genetic variants that have been found to date are implicated in other conditions as well, ranging from schizophrenia to suicide, from depression to substance abuse, in addition to being linked to anti-social and criminal behavior.

So it does seem likely that a complex set of DNA variants could one day be identified that predispose individuals to criminal behavior. In fact, defense attorneys have already used the sequence of a gene in their client to successfully reduce the severity of a sentence handed down to a cold-blooded murderer tried in 2013. Accordingly, the field is awash in controversy and ethical dilemmas. These issues will only grow more complex and disconcerting, since it is very likely that the same violence-associated DNA signature will also be present in a significant proportion of the non-criminal general population, not just in the tiny percentage of people who ultimately go on to commit violent crimes.

In other words, DNA probably won't be the whole answer, but will likely be an important part of it. While necessary, it will also almost invariably be insufficient, on its own, to help identify individuals at risk for criminal behavior.

Indeed, if future generations want to try to screen individuals at risk to commit violent crimes such as mass murder or spree killing or serial murder, then they will most likely need to couple genetic information with many other measures. At this point in time most scientists envision that the best predictor of violent behavior will probably be some combination of DNA testing, brain scan imaging, psychological tests, interviews, metabolic profiles and who knows what else…before we can hope to identify individuals truly at risk for these especially tragic violent crimes impacting society at all levels.

Of course, I learned much of this only later, when I was researching *The Ripper Gene* long after reading that initial article. As a writer, I was fascinated by a different aspect of the issue than the legal conundrum. I was far more concerned with the question of what all this research means for humanity's classical notions of "good versus evil," many of which have been held since the beginning of recorded history. In other words, if DNA variation matters with respect to defining our baseline ability to choose between right and wrong, what are the implications for such a fundamental concept as "free will"? Are we all *really* born and created equal, as we've been told, or are some of us hindered out of the gate, hampered by a genetic Achilles heel when it comes to aggression, impulse control, and empathy?

It's an interesting question, and the main one posed within the pages of *The Ripper Gene* as the FBI agents Woodson and Madden

pursue a newly emerged serial killer who seems hell-bent on constructing a terrifying tableau across the counties of southern Mississippi and the parishes of southern Louisiana. As a novel, *The Ripper Gene* doesn't attempt to provide a definitive answer on this controversial topic. Rather, my intention was only to illuminate it as a question that needs to be asked, and considered, before technology and science carry us as a society so swiftly forward that we find ourselves on the verge of understanding the link between genetics and violence without having yet considered what it really means for us as citizens, as individuals, and as human beings ourselves.

As a pharmaceutical and academic scientist, writing a thriller that touches on these complex issues was a risk, but it brought me one of my most memorable moments when the book was released. Among many reviews, one stood out personally for me. It was a strongly positive review from a well-known geneticist who writes a popular blog on DNA science (blogs.plos.org/dnascience/author/rlewis/). In her review, Dr. Ricki Lewis extolled *The Ripper Gene* as a "case study in genetic determinism" and claimed that its scientific premise provided "a plausible set-up for the biology of violence."

As a debut author peeking around the corner at every new review, breathing a sigh of relief whenever *The Ripper Gene* was given positive marks, that feedback was tremendous. Here, then, finally, a scientist had…well, gotten it. Though I'd received many other kindly and positive reviews to that point, this was the first voicing of strong support from a bona fide scientific peer. I'd been worried to that point whether my scientific colleagues would dismiss *The Ripper Gene* as a waste of time, or as thoroughly unbelievable. You can imagine my relief upon hearing a "card-carrying" geneticist say that

it was not only a "good story," but that it possessed a plausible set-up for examining the biology of antisocial behavior.

As such, I hope *The Ripper Gene* does its small part to call attention to the critical crossroads towards which we're all headed—and provides readers with an entertaining and engrossing FBI mystery along the way!

DR. MICHAEL RANSOM is a molecular pharmacologist and a globally recognized expert in the field of pharmacogenomics. He is widely published in scientific journals and has edited multiple textbooks in biomedical research. He is a pharmaceutical scientist and an adjunct professor at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine. Raised in rural Mississippi, he now makes his home in northern New Jersey. His novel *The Ripper Gene* has been called "scary as the devil" (*Suspense Magazine*) and hailed as both "a spectacular debut" (*Providence Review*) and a "smart, sophisticated murder mystery" (*Killer Nashville*). Interested readers can learn more at www.michaelransombooks.com.

BARBARA ROSS

The Maine Clambake Mysteries

Like many authors, I suspect, I find it difficult to pinpoint the single inspiration for a novel or short story. Stephen King says that frequently it's the confluence of two ideas that ignites the spark. For *Carrie*, he read that telekinesis is most often attached to teenage girls (an idea he wanted to explore) and combined that with the idea of teen bullying (a subject he knew well from his work as a high school substitute teacher). That's what happens for me most of the time. An idea is combined with at least one other, and they roil in my head for a long time before they emerge in fiction.

But I do know, exactly, the single word that begat one of my novels, the first Maine Clambake Mystery, *Clammed Up*.

My first mystery, *The Death of an Ambitious Woman*, was published in 2010 by Five Star/Cengage. Five Star was terrific to work with, but they only contracted for one book at a time. I longed to write a series. Why? Because series mysteries are, more than anything, what

I love to read. I love to watch characters and settings grow and change over time. I love it when you discover a fabulous new author and learn there are five or six or more books just waiting for you to gobble up. And I love it when you have caught up with the author and eagerly await each new release.

In the fall of 2011, author Sheila Connolly, who was then president of Sisters in Crime New England (SinCNE), was contacted by literary agent John Talbot. He had an idea for a cozy mystery series; did she know anyone who was interested in writing a spec proposal? The idea had not been sold, he emphasized, but it was one he thought might sell. Both he and the writer would be investing their time.

Sheila, being a much nicer person than I am, decided she wouldn't cherry-pick among SinCNE members. Rather, she would throw the idea open to the full membership and let people respond as they wished.

I didn't respond immediately. I did some due diligence on John and I did some soul-searching about whether I was interested in writing a cozy mystery. My first book had been a more traditional mystery. It had many cozy elements, including a closed group of suspects and a community setting, but it also featured a female police chief. Professional sleuths are not unheard of, but they are unusual in cozy mysteries.

In the end, I decided I did have an interest in cozies and I wanted to go for it. I wrote to John giving him the information I thought an agent would want. My first book had sold through its advance in the first payment period after its release, I had a number of published short stories and I was going to be president of Sisters in Crime New England the following year. I hoped these bona fides showed

I could finish a publishable book, I wasn't a one-hit wonder, and I was enmeshed in the mystery community, and therefore probably understood the genre from both the writing and market perspectives.

John called shortly after receiving my e-mail. He'd given his original idea to another writer, but he had a number of others. The first two he suggested weren't for me. One was a subject I wasn't interested in exploring. The other, I didn't think could sustain a mystery series.

His third idea was one word, "Clambake."

"That's it," I said.

In the late 1980s, my mother-in-law had shocked everyone in the family by purchasing a bed-and-breakfast in a large Victorian house overlooking the water in Boothbay Harbor, Maine. Fifteen years later, when the physical work of running the inn became too much for her, my husband and I bought the property. We don't run the old sea captain's home as an inn, but we do spend our summers there. I had spent many happy hours on the big front porch, staring out at the harbor and thinking, "I should use this setting in a novel." In addition, a Maine friend, author Lea Wait, had told me her daughter had her wedding reception on a private island off Boothbay Harbor where a family ran a clambake.

Thus the Maine Clambake Mystery series was born. The proposal consisted of a description of the series premise, the continuing characters, brief summaries of the first three books, and three sample chapters from the first book. Since the proposal was speculative, I was determined not to overthink it (a tendency to which I am prone). I named the location of the clambakes "Morrow Island" using a middle name that has been in my family for four generations, though

no one knows where it comes from. I named my protagonist Julia for a niece. I named my fictional town "Busman's Harbor," because I wanted to move some places around and not be tied to the real Boothbay region. I knew I'd have to explain the town's name later, but I didn't worry about it. (And I did explain it, and gave it a history, in the second book in the series, *Boiled Over*.)

I was writing in the long tail of the 2008 recession, when resort towns still struggled with a lack of tourist money, so the notion that my protagonist's family had taken out an unwise loan on the their property and stood to lose it all was a natural one. Because the first time I heard about this island clambake the story involved a wedding, the first murder took place at one. And so merrily I went.

I submitted the proposal in late November and it was bought by Kensington Books in February. I wrote most of the first novel over a long, cold winter and didn't get to go to the real Cabbage Island Clambake until after the first draft was done. But that was probably just as well. It meant I had to make up my own island and family and clambake rituals.

There were still a lot of things to work out in the writing—theme, tone, and plot for a few. And I made some mistakes because of my philosophy of not thinking too much. For example, two important character names end in s, which results in a constant trail of "s's," which is annoying. And my two hunky young men have names that are gender-ambiguous, which means I constantly have to work a "he" into the paragraphs in which they are introduced.

But overall, I have loved exploring the community of my fictional town and mining more stories to tell. After the first three books, my

contract was renewed for three more, plus a novella, and I will happily write Maine Clambake Mysteries as long as readers are interested.

BARBARA ROSS is the author of the Maine Clambake Mysteries, *Clammed Up, Boiled Over, Musseled Out* and *Fogged Inn. Clammed Up* was nominated for an Agatha Award for Best Contemporary Novel and was a finalist for the Maine Literary Award for Crime Fiction. Barbara blogs with a wonderful group of Maine mystery authors at Maine Crime Writers and with a group of writers of New England-based cozy mysteries at Wicked Cozy Authors. Barbara and her husband own the former Seafarer Inn at the head of the harbor in Boothbay Harbor, Maine. For more on Barbara and her work, visit www.maineclambakemysteries.com.

LYNN SHOLES AND JOE MOORE

The Cotton Stone Thrillers and Other Works

Asked to think about the inspirations for our books, the first thing that comes to mind is the easiest to take for granted: our collaboration. Our constant, searching dialogue has led to many of our books' most gripping moments and intriguing plot points—and to a great deal of fun in the process of creating them. For us, two heads are definitely better than one.

Without a doubt, the most important book for us was our first collaboration, *The Grail Conspiracy*. It was inspired by an article in *Discover Magazine* about an archaeologist in Jerusalem finding a relic he believed was the Holy Grail—the cup from the Last Supper and the one used to collect Christ's blood at the Crucifixion. He speculated that it might contain traces of His blood and DNA. The question we based the novel on was: what if someone used the DNA to clone Christ? After three years of research and writing, we produced a novel that wound up being an international bestseller

translated into 24 languages. And it proved that we could collaborate on fiction together.

Since then, one of the most frequent questions we are asked is "How is it possible for two people to write fiction together?" The answer is: it ain't easy. At least it wasn't at first. Collaboration on non-fiction is simpler to understand. With non-fiction, the "facts" already exist and the collaborators' job is to research and organize them into a readable document that has a beginning, middle, and end. A good outline and knowledge of the subject along with professional writing skills may be all the authors need.

But with fiction, nothing exists. It's all mental conception, creation, and construction. Fiction is a product of an individual's imagination. It might be inspired by facts or events, but only the individual has a specific vision of those events in his or her head. So how can two people have a similar enough vision to be able to write a novel?

We can't speak for the handful of other writing teams out there, but we have written nine thrillers together, and we think our collaboration works for these reasons. First, we love the same kind of books—the ones we read are like the ones we write. Second, we have an unquestioning respect for each other's writing skills and a deep belief that whatever one of us writes, the other can improve. Third, we believe that there's always a better way to write something. Fourth, we never let our egos get in the way of a good story. This comes from spending over ten years in a weekly writers critique group. Fifth, we know each other's strengths and weaknesses, and are willing to admit them. Sixth, we agree on the same message in each book. Seventh, we believe that we are on the same level of expertise. And last, we believe that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

Those points cover the mental portion. Now, how do we handle the mechanics of the job? We talk, and talk, and talk. Once a day we conference call; brainstorming and telling and retelling each other the story. Our two favorite words are: What if? Whether it's global plot points or an individual scene or character motivation, we keep telling each other the story until that little imaginary movie in our minds becomes as in sync as possible. Then one of us will declare to have a "handle" on the scene or character or chapter and create the first draft.

We write slowly because each chapter must go back and forth many times for revision. Years ago, when we first started, everyone could tell who wrote what as we tried to finish our first book. It took three years of hard work before we fused our voices. Now, because the process goes through so many revisions, most of the time neither of us can remember who wrote what. We rely on each other so much that we both wonder how it is possible for anyone to write a book on his or her own.

There are both advantages and disadvantages to collaborating. A big disadvantage is that you split the money you make. So you'll always make half of what you would as a single author. And like any relationship, there is always a chance of a falling out. And something could happen where an ego can become inflated and affect the process.

A giant plus is that we never experience writer's block. One of us will always have an idea on how to get out of a jam or move the story forward. And unlike our family, friends, trusted beta readers, and everyone else, a co-writer has an intimate, vested interest in the success of the story that no one else could have.

We are approaching the mid-point of our tenth thriller together. We believe that the whole thing boils down to trust. We trust in each other and in the goals we both want to achieve with the story and with our careers.

If you and another writer are inspired to consider collaboration, a few suggestions. Understand why you think collaboration would be beneficial and share that with your co-author. Know the co-writer and his or her work before entering into a collaborative arrangement. Come to the relationship with an open mind and flexible ideas. Respect your collaborator's ideas and opinions. Leave your ego at the door—a partnership works because of input from both sides and a healthy respect for each other. There are no stupid ideas.

Explore each writer's strengths—if your specialty is plot and your partner's specialty is description, then use those strengths to the work's advantage. The ideal collaboration results in a story that neither writer could generate on his or her own.

Divide the workload and agree on it at the beginning. Perhaps one of you will write the first draft and the other will edit/revise the draft. Perhaps one will write the skeleton and the other will fill in the descriptions. There is no single method of collaboration. It is as unique as the two writers who come together to collaborate. But each writer wants to feel involved in the process.

Discuss differences of opinion and employ the art of compromise. Allow for an easy, clean way out in case the partnership doesn't gel.

Most important, have fun. Collaboration can and should be fun. If it is not, try something else.

LYNN SHOLES and **JOE MOORE** are the #1 Amazon and international bestselling authors of *The Blade, The Shield, The Tomb, Thor Bunker, The Phoenix Apostles, The Grail Conspiracy, The Last Secret, The Hades Project,* and *The 731 Legacy*. Find them online at www.sholesmoore.blogspot.com.

JOANNA CAMPBELL SLAN

The Kiki Lowenstein Mysteries

My series protagonist Kiki Lowenstein—like a lot of us, I suppose—was "born" out of failure. In fact, it was Kiki who taught me the truth behind the phrase *Fluctuat nec mergitu:* "She is tossed by the waves but does not sink," the city motto of Paris. She came to me at a time when I was definitely knocked off my feet by life's rough currents. I thought for sure that I would drown in my own misery.

My teenaged son and I butted heads constantly. Even the family therapist didn't offer much help. At our final session, he lowered his reading glasses and said to me, "Do you realize your son thinks you're a *schmuck*?"

While most people think *schmuck* means "idiot," the literal translation is "penis."

Even my son was shocked.

You might think this was the low point of my existence. It wasn't. Things got worse.

I had paid $1,000 to a book doctor to help me polish up a manuscript featuring a young mom who loved to scrapbook. She came back to me with her critique. She hated the character, thought the scrapbooking premise was boring, and "Oh, by the way, I think you're a racist." (This sprang from her interpretation of a scene in my book. I've never had anyone else respond to that scene that same way.)

A racist? And a penis? And a terrible mother?

But I didn't have time to wallow in self-pity. Because I had been sure that the book doctor would help me get my work-in-progress ready, I'd paid the registration fee, booked a hotel room, and scheduled myself to attend SleuthFest, the annual conference put on by the Florida Chapter of Mystery Writers of America. I'd also forked over an additional fee to meet with an editor and an agent.

Yeah, I'd been THAT confident I'd have a book to pitch. Now I had *bupkis*. (Loosely translated as "nothing," but literally meaning "goat droppings.")

I thought about not going. But that would mean I'd wasted two thousand dollars, one thousand for the book doctor and about the same for my SleuthFest expenses. That didn't include the money we'd blown on family counseling.

I might be a racist, a penis, and a terrible mother, but I'm also a Scot. My thrifty self had reached its limit.

And I started to get mad. Really mad. I wondered, "What could be worse than this?" As answers popped into my head, I mentally revised my main character, Kiki Lowenstein. I took everything awful, stirred it up, and shaped it into one pitiful woman. Not surprisingly, she also adopted my sense of despair. Despite the book doctor's advice, I held onto the scrapbooking idea. See, it's a metaphor. Here's

this miserable person, pasting pretty photos into an album, pretending to have an ideal family life … only … she doesn't. I totally understood that.

Thus reinvigorated, I set to work. The entire month of February, leading up to SleuthFest, I rolled out of bed and went directly to my computer, determined to improve my manuscript. At SleuthFest, I pitched my book to an agent and an editor. They both wanted to sign me.

Kiki saved the day.

She saved me, too.

When that first book—*Paper, Scissors, Death*—became a finalist for the Agatha Award, I felt vindication.

Kiki has become my BFF, my Best Friend Forever. Over the years (12 books and 30-plus short stories and counting), she's grown stronger and more self-confident. She's picked up a legion of fans who are fabulously devoted to my character. Whereas once she was a repository for all my misery, I've also imbued the Kiki Lowenstein books with the best parts of my life. So Kiki has a harlequin Great Dane that'll never age, a historic home in Webster Groves, Missouri, and a successful crafting business.

As for my son, I recently returned from spending Thanksgiving with him and his girlfriend. He told me that he planned to raise his future children the same way we raised him, except maybe even stricter. When I left to get on the plane and fly home, he hugged me and said, "I love you, Mom."

I've been tossed, but I'm a survivor. Kiki is, too.

National bestselling and award-winning author **JOANNA CAMPBELL SLAN** has written 30 books, including both fiction and non-fiction works. Her nonfiction has been endorsed by Toastmasters International, her first novel was shortlisted for the Agatha Award, and her historical fiction won the Daphne du Maurier Award of Excellence. In addition to writing fiction, she edits the Happy Homicides Anthologies and pens the Dollhouse Décor & More series of "how to" books for dollhouse miniaturists. Recently, one of her short stories was accepted for inclusion in the prestigious *Chesapeake Crimes: Fur, Feathers, and Felonies* anthology. Visit her website at www.joannacampbellslan.com to read two of her books absolutely free, find links to her Pinterest boards on miniatures and other subjects, and learn more about the author and her books.

MAGGIE TOUSSAINT

The Dreamwalker Mysteries

Inspiration often hits when you're not looking. It wasn't all that long ago that I was casting about for ideas for Book 2 of my paranormal cozy mystery series. My amateur sleuth, Baxley Powell, is a dreamwalker, a skill that allows her to network with the living and the dead to solve murders.

Book 1, *Gone and Done It*, introduced Baxley and showed her call to action. After many years of denying her extra abilities, she's finally on board with using them. I knew I wanted the premise of Book 2 to follow in the same lighthearted vein, and I wanted it to reflect the Southern culture.

Ideas came and went like the tides. Each one didn't quite suit. Maddeningly, I didn't know what I was looking for, but I was certain I'd know it when I saw it. I got my head out of my favorite authors' books and the Internet. I scoured newspapers, obituaries, and news from near and far, searching for something to rouse my muse out of deep sleep. I listened to people talking everywhere I went.

And then, just when I was thinking I'd have to burn my "I'm an author" card, something happened. Maybe it was serendipity, but I took it as a gift from the story ether. Here's the tale.

My husband came home from a golf tournament in a really good mood, chuckling over an incident in the pro shop. The various pairings had played rounds of golf and were waiting to hear their placements so they could collect any prizes they'd won.

The pro was bemoaning the fact that everything was recorded except for one group's score. If they only had that, he could hand out the money. My husband happened to be in the pro shop looking at the merchandise. He didn't recognize the name of the man who was the captain for that tardy group, but another man did.

"I know that guy," the helpful golfer said. "I saw him over in the bar. Want me to get him for you?"

The pro said, "Sure."

So the guy went to the door and yelled, "Hey, Bubba!"

What happened next tickled the daylights out of my Northern-raised husband. Four guys looked up from their beers, tipped their heads to the side, and drawled back, "What?"

Despite the name confusion, the prizes were soon sorted out, and everyone went home. But the event made a definite impression on my fellow. He couldn't believe so many men would admit to being called that nickname. We had a lively discussion about nicknames in general and some Bubbas I knew, and I thought that was the end of it.

However, between bedtime and wake-up, inspiration struck. What if my next book was about mistaken identity? The idea appealed to me. All my life I'd been surrounded by clusters of names. My church had had two choir directors with the first name of Carol, there were

two neighbors named Carol in my neighborhood, and I had a sister named Carol.

At this point I wasn't sure who'd be the victim in my story or how I'd reveal the killer's name. The only thing I was certain of was my sister would kill me if I used her name for a villain in a book. So, I wouldn't use Carol, but there were plenty of other names in the world.

Even Bubba.

I knew I had a story seed, so I began to seriously work on the victim's characterization. Since my Dreamwalker series is set in the same type of rural community that I live in, I know the type of businesses and people who belong here. My familiarity with the setting helps me assure the authenticity of the setting and the characters.

Banks were in crisis at the time, foreclosing on homes like crazy. A banker seemed the best fit for someone who had high-stress conflicts with multiple people. The more I considered the possibilities, the more certain I became that this was the story I wanted to write.

And I'd invert the whole whodunit flow plan by having the victim name his killer before he died. I'm sure I'm not the first person to consider this, but having the reader know who did it up front felt so novel, so fresh, that the words began pouring out of me. I didn't even have a chance to fully flesh out all my suspects before I was deep in the story weeds.

In the opening scene, my amateur sleuth and the sheriff are diverted to the banker's house when the 911 call comes in. They arrive not a moment too soon. With his dying breath, the banker named his killer: "Bubba done it." That phrase became the title of my book.

Oh, did I have fun with my Bubbas! Lucky for me, I also have access to a brainstorming team who helped me deepen the characterization of the Bubbas and the banker so that each had deep character flaws and redeeming factors. Later in the story, when I needed to tighten the screws, my sleuth realizes she's barely scratched the surface of the Bubbas in the county.

Though murder is serious business, an amateur sleuth's investigations can span the gamut from slapstick to serious, which is how a food fight got included in my lighthearted and decidedly Southern story.

To sum up, after a successful Book 1, I worried about attaining that same high bar of story craft. The harder I tried, the more I failed to move forward. It wasn't until I stopped trying to force it and opened myself to possibilities that everything jelled. Book 2 in my Dreamwalker mystery series, *Bubba Done It*, was everything *Gone and Done It* had been and more.

Southern author **MAGGIE TOUSSAINT** loves writing mysteries. She's published 12 novels in mystery and romantic suspense. Under the pen name of Rigel Carson, she's published three dystopian thrillers. *Bubba Done It*, Book 2 in her Dreamwalker series, is her latest mystery release. The next Dreamwalker book, *Doggone It*, appears in October 2016. She also writes and publishes short stories and novellas. She's a board member for Southeast Mystery Writers of America and Low Country Sisters In Crime. Visit her at www.maggietoussaint.com.

WENDY TYSON

The Greenhouse Mysteries

It was October of 2014, just days before Halloween. My husband and I had driven through the mountains of South Carolina for a book event, a solo signing at a bookstore in a small town, not far from the North Carolina border. I was about a year into this whole publishing thing—my first novel, *Killer Image*, had been released on October 1, 2013, and the second in the series, *Deadly Assets*, that past July—and I was still naïve enough to think "if you have one, they will come."

Readers, that is.

Only they didn't. At least not for that solo book signing in that small town in North Carolina. Oh, I did my best to get people there. I advertised the signing on Facebook. I tweeted about it every day leading up to the date. I created an invitation. I posted the event on my website. Still, it was me, the lovely and engaging shop owner, my husband, and a plate full of cookies. Not one reader.

I might have felt discouraged, except that a wonderful thing happened: I saw firsthand that small rural town in action. Others with shops along the petite town center stopped in to chat with the bookstore owner. Their kids popped over after school, ate a few cookies, and then quizzed the storeowner and me about the latest and best books. There was a buzz in the air, an energy, and despite the town's remote location, I felt a worldly attention to life beyond its mountainous borders.

It was early evening when we were finished, so after the signing, my husband and I visited the beer shop/café a few stores down to grab some provisions for the evening. There, we joined some of the townspeople who had congregated in the shop to share a drink and a conversation before heading home for the night. The atmosphere felt lively with laughter and debate. With the headlines blasting tragedies, atrocities and injustices at every turn, I could see the beauty of living in a place where people knew you.

And then a funny thing happened. While I stood in that beer shop, watching the locals relax after a tiring day, I had a vision of a similar shop. Only this one would be in rural Pennsylvania. And it would be an organic grocery and café. And the owner would be a woman returning to her roots after a stint as a lawyer in Chicago. I'd been looking for a way to weave my family's passion for organic farming and sustainable living into my novels, and here it was, served to me after a long, peaceful day in the picturesque mountains of the South.

The Greenhouse Mystery Series was born.

I'm no stranger to small towns. I may have grown up outside of Philadelphia, but I spent most of my youth and young adulthood in one small town (or "neighborhood") or another, and my husband

(we've been together since we were 18) is from a village in the Pocono Mountains of Pennsylvania. Even now, with a house only ten miles from the Philadelphia city limits and a job in a sprawling suburb, my home-away-from-home is a particular small town in the Green Mountains of Vermont.

But there was magic in *that* charming small town on that day in late October. Everything had come together, and I wanted to hold on to the magic.

We left the signing feeling pretty good. Sure, the event had been a bust—at least from the perspective of book sales—and I felt bad about that. My eyes had been opened to other possibilities, though, and I couldn't wait to get started on a new mystery. In the end, I'm thankful to the bookstore in that small town, and the townspeople along that adorable main street, for providing inspiration. What a splendid reminder that sometimes we get what we need, not what we think we need.

WENDY TYSON is an author, lawyer and former therapist from Philadelphia. She writes two series, the Allison Campbell Mystery Series and the Greenhouse Mystery Series. The first book in the Campbell Series, *Killer Image*, was named a 2014 best mystery for book clubs by Examiner.com. The first Greenhouse mystery, *A Muddied Murder*, was released March 29, 2016. Wendy is a member of Sisters in Crime and International Thriller Writers, and she is a contributing editor for *The Big Thrill* and *The Thrill Begins*, International Thriller Writers' online magazines. Find Wendy at www.watyson.com.

BOB VAN LAERHOVEN

Baudelaire's Revenge

I was 52 before I could sit down with enough confidence to write *Baudelaire's Revenge*, the book I always had wanted to write.

Baudelaire's verses fascinated me even before I was able to understand the brilliant depth of his poetry. I was 18 then, and lived in a small Flemish village very close to the Dutch border. There was no reading culture, no books in my parents' house. They were hard-working people, striving to provide their four sons a better future. There was a small but well-stocked library in the village, though, and the librarian noticed my hunger for reading. Eventually, he advised me to read *De Bloemen Van den Booze*, the Dutch translation of Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal*.

I was so flabbergasted—by the mysterious language, the elegant phrases, and the mystical depth I sensed behind the metaphors—that in my free time I learned enough French to be able to read the original versions of the poems. The rhythm of those words was intoxicating.

I reveled in the veiled threat they carried in such a sparkling language, the hopeless longing, the devious cunning, the desires paralleled with a death wish, and the courtly love linked with debauchery. It was dazzling. In short: Baudelaire's ghost had me in its grip.

I vowed that I would become an author and that I would write about this mysterious poet, so sensitive and yet so brutal, so pure yet so depraved. The chances of my being able to fulfill that promise seemed slim.

But against all odds, I kept my vow.

The fictional secret about Baudelaire on which the plot of *Baudelaire's Revenge* hinges is built in part on fact. During Baudelaire's life, the French nobility and bourgeoisie alike frowned upon the poet. Among other things, he was called a pervert and a decadent. The French government censored his poetry and threw him in jail when *Les Fleurs du Mal* appeared, and the literary establishment despised him. Nevertheless, with his extravagant clothing and daring opinions about life, death, and sex, he was a role model for many young and stylish Parisians.

Baudelaire was something of what we would today call a drama queen. Everyone in the artistic salons of that time knew some tragic story about the "doomed poet." Baudelaire's hypersensitivity and hysterical conundrums fed a lot of myths around his person, especially after his death. Even during his life, rumors abounded, in part because Baudelaire himself liked to tell outrageous stories about himself, his family, and his travels. He clearly was a myth maniac.

Allegedly, one of those stories was that he was doomed to lead a dramatic and wretched life because he had a twin sister, misshapen at birth, who was (in the custom of that time) whisked away to a

convent and who then died early. When his entourage asked for details, Baudelaire remained vague, alluding to the fact that his taste for "evil" had its roots in the fact that he possessed a "damaged soul." The reason for that was the loss of his twin sister. Finding this concept of a damaged soul fascinating, I knew I wanted to use it in the novel. From there on, the story came to me, as if it had waited for that starting point.

I wanted to be as true as possible to my subject. Therefore, my novel had to mirror the sadomasochistic tendencies of Baudelaire, who was a great poet but a wreck of a man. Fashionable nobility and artists in his time sought to impress as being a bit perverse. This added luster to their reputations. The exotic held a great appeal, and *moeurs de terres lointaines* were considered a sign of worldliness. Charles Baudelaire himself was one of the Decadents, an informal group of artists who wanted to break through all social and sexual boundaries. Freedom (for men, rather than women) was their highest call.

But I also wanted to show that under the glittering surface, there was a much harsher reality. For instance, 15-year-old performing prostitutes, or *poupées*, weren't unusual in some brothels. Children were treated like adults much earlier than they are now. So behind the fashionable glamour were hidden small, sad, all-too-human realities. At that time, these were everyday realities. So I presented them like that: almost collateral, things to be taken for granted.

When it came to my fictional policemen, I had free reign to invent. It's said that in love and friendship we're seeking kindred souls. But often, that's not the reality. I've observed a lot of couples that seem to have opposing characters, but share a certain vibe that becomes

the emotional glue between them. Because they are opposites, they possess a kind of objectivity toward each other, and often that detachment is a good thing. We know so little of ourselves that coexisting with a similar partner can be irksome. We recognize something, a character trait or attitude, in him or her that we ourselves share, but in that "other" we find it offensive or irritating.

With that in mind, I decided to give Commissioner Lefèvre and Inspector Bouveroux the same background—the Algerian war that has welded them together—but very different personalities. In this way, they form a good team and gave me the opportunity to describe the mystery from both sides.

The novel's material about Algiers comes in part from my experience as a travel writer in mostly war-torn countries from 1990 until the end of 2003. I was 50 then, and by that point I felt that part of my life was over. My last journeys, among them to Gaza, Iran, and the region of the Wa-rebels in Myanmar (Burma), had taught me that I had become too jumpy. Something was closing in. I simply knew that I had to stop before destiny struck.

Even then, I remained fascinated by the things humans do in warfare and by the question of where all that violence stems from. You know how writers are: they try to transcend the personal, transform it into the universal. Therefore, I mix things up, even replace them in time. I wasn't in Algiers in the 19th century, of course, but my own experience there translated well into the era of *Baudelaire's Revenge*, giving Lefèvre and Bouveroux the kind of bond that comes from sharing dark or dangerous experience.

BOB VAN LAERHOVEN has written more than 30 books published in Holland and Belgium, becoming well known for kaleidoscopic novels in which the fate of the individual is closely related to broad social transformations. *Baudelaire's Revenge*, published in English by Pegasus Books, won the 2007 Hercule Poirot Prize for Best Crime Novel. Van Laerhoven's freelance writing and work for Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders) International has brought him to places of conflict, including Somalia, Liberia, Sudan, Gaza, Iran, Iraq, Myanmar, and the city of Sarajevo, some of which appear in his novels. Van Laerhoven's latest work published in English is the short story collection *Dangerous Obsessions*. Find out more about Bob's work at www.bobvanlaerhoven.be.

TINA WHITTLE

The Tai Randolph/Trey Seaver Mysteries

In *How To Write Killer Fiction*, Carolyn Wheat describes writing the middle part of a novel as "waist deep in the big muddy." She's not exaggerating. When my first novel *The Dangerous Edge of Things* reached its midpoint, the Big Muddy almost sucked me under. I had no idea what these people I'd created were up to—their motives and goals and secrets were a treacherous, mucky mire. My plot was crumbling, and my book along with it.

Seeing my dilemma, a friend offered to do a tarot reading for me. "It will show you what's going on with the book," she said. I was curious, but skeptical. After all, what could a deck of fortunetelling cards accomplish that storyboards and plot outlines hadn't?

But I was desperate. And, I had to admit, curious. So I tucked my skepticism into my back pocket and sat across from my friend as she divined the intricacies of my novel. First, she had me shuffle the deck. Then she laid out the cards in a pattern called the Celtic Cross.

"That which covers you, that which crosses," she explained. "Above and below, before and behind."

She tapped the first card, a dark-haired man seated on a throne, a gleaming rapier upright beside him. "The central conflict involves the King of Swords," she said. "A man of strength and power and intellect, someone who holds the power of life and death in his hand. Often solitary, sometimes ruthless, but ultimately fair and objective."

I was stunned. She was describing Trey, my male protagonist, like she'd sneaked a peek at the character synopsis. A former SWAT sniper, Trey was indeed strong and powerful and smart. He was also deeply alone, the result of cognitive damage from a car accident that had lost him his law enforcement job and in many ways, his purpose in life. Fair and objective, absolutely. To a fault.

Then other cards turned up. The Queen of Cups: submerged and unexpressed emotion, perhaps jealousy (the ex-girlfriend). The Knight of Wands: an energetic ally with charisma and passion (the former partner). Justice reversed: a situation riddled with bias and prejudice (the initial crime). And then, in the final position, The Magician.

"It all ends with a single choice," my friend said, "a big one, the kind of choice you have to believe in with everything you've got. A life-changing, maybe even life-saving, choice."

And as I stared at those cards, at the swords and wands and clear-eyed figures, I suddenly understood what my intuition had been trying to tell me all along. I'd been going at it backwards. Instead of letting the sequence of events flow from my characters' desires and goals, I'd imposed a series of events on them. No wonder my book

was drowning; I'd forced straightjackets on my characters and tossed them in the whitewater.

I wasn't the first writer to do this, of course. Hog-tying one's characters is a common pitfall in the tug-of-war between the free-wheeling creativity of the subconscious and the controlling taskmaster of the conscious mind. But this is why tarot is such an effective tool in the creative person's toolkit. It provides a channel of communication between your conscious and subconscious minds. As your own responses to the images in the deck bubble up, you try out different scenarios, look at situations from a new perspective. Facts rub together in new ways, creating sparks.

It's a unique feature of the human animal, this language we speak of symbol and image. It provides the necessary fertile ground for work of the imagination, but as is true of most creative spaces, it can get messy in there. Your subconscious functions like a giant attic, with lots of information stuffed here, bits and pieces crammed over there, dusty boxes overflowing. There's treasure in the trinkets and trash, certainly, but unless you have some way to find what you need when you need it, it can be pretty overwhelming.

Tarot is like a very smart, very friendly guide who knows you—and your attic—well enough to bring you exactly what you need exactly when you need it. All you have to do is ask.

My first tarot reading was so successful that I went on to become a tarot reader myself. I now lay out cards for friends and family seeking creative solutions to life's challenges, especially other writers seeking solutions for their current work-in-progress woes. I have since decided that the same impulse that led me to mystery writing, both as a reader and a writer, also led me to tarot. Like most mystery

enthusiasts, I don't mind exploring the dark side of things—after all, a shadow is just substance plus light.

Mysteries take us to the heart of that shadow. They wade into chaos and return with order. The villain is revealed, and justice is served. But the mysteries that really catch my interest, the ones that hit me deep, are the ones that leave some questions on the table. The mysteries that make me ponder the human condition, the human heart, and the human soul.

My personal story has a happy ending. Thanks to the tarot, not only was my novel successfully completed, it became the first in a series. And that character, the one personified by the King of Swords? He went on to become one of my co-protagonists.

I am now working on the sixth in the Tai Randolph/Trey Seaver Mysteries. It seems my narrator Tai, a Queen of Wands woman, found Trey just as fascinating as I did and decided to keep him around. He agreed. And even though my hero remains an intellectual—a coolly rational Swords man if there ever were one—I tucked a tarot deck in his desk, just to remind him that sometimes he should put away his graphs and flow charts and open himself to the mysterious powers of intuition.

TINA WHITTLE'S Tai Randolph/Trey Seaver series—featuring intrepid gun-shop owner Tai and her corporate security agent partner Trey—has garnered starred reviews in *Kirkus*, *Publishers Weekly*, *Booklist*, and *Library Journal*. The fifth book in this Atlanta-based series, *Reckoning and Ruin*, was released in April

2016 from Poisoned Pen Press. A nominee for Georgia Author of the Year, Tina enjoys golf, sushi, and reading tarot cards. You can find her at her official website, www.tinawhittle.com.

MICHAEL WILEY

The Bad Kitty Lounge

Early on a summer Sunday morning, I was walking across Hemming Park in downtown Jacksonville, Florida, when I bumped into a woman who was still stumbling after a Saturday night full of parties. She wore short cut-off jeans and a t-shirt that caught my attention. In bold pink letters on a black background, the shirt said, *BAD KITTY.*

I'm sure that some writers have moments of inspiration before they write each book. I don't. But I knew at that instant that I would write a book called *Bad Kitty*. St. Martin's Minotaur had contracted to publish my first noir mystery, *The Last Striptease*, and I had been looking for my next subject. Here it was, stumbling and mumbling but in a way that dark poetry can trip along with rough coherence.

I rushed home and Googled "bad kitty" to make sure that I had the title to myself. And my heart sank. There *was* already a *Bad Kitty*. In fact, there were many *Bad Kitties*. And, worse, they were children's books. Nick Bruel writes a popular series with titles like *Bad Kitty*

Gets a Bath, *Happy Birthday Bad Kitty*, and *Bad Kitty Meets the Baby*. I knew without looking that none of his books included a half-drunk woman wandering through a park on a sunny Sunday morning, but how could I do better than his *Bad Kitty vs. Uncle Murray*?

I slept on the question that night, and in the morning I had the answer. Bruel might take his bad kitty to the vet or to elementary school, but I figured he would never take his kitty to a seedy bar of the kind that pops up on every noir street corner. I had my title and my concept: the book would be called *The Bad Kitty Lounge*.

But on which corner would one find such a lounge? Who would drink there?

Some of the answers came easily. *The Last Striptease* was the first in a series of Chicago mysteries featuring private detective Joe Kozmarski. So, the lounge would be in Chicago, and Kozmarski would need to investigate a crime involving it.

But, really, in the 21st century, who would name a bar "The Bad Kitty Lounge" except with hipster irony? And, even if someone did, who would drink there other than ironic hipsters? The name sounded to my ears as if it belonged in neon and during an earlier era—sometime between the end of World War II and the end of Nixon. In Chicago, that gave me a few possibilities, including North Lincoln Avenue, which is still lit up at night by old neon, and parts of the city's Southwest Side that burned during the 1968 race riots.

I went with the Southwest Side.

Joe Kozmarski would have been a toddler in 1968. So, if not him, *who* hung out at the Bad Kitty Lounge? I needed people who were invested in being there, characters who would have reason to remember the place—and even die for it—decades later when Joe was

in business. Why not people who participated in the uprisings, lighting or fighting the fires? Why not revolutionaries and property owners who, in later years, would become hustlers, political activists, thieves, humanitarians, and real estate magnates—culprits and victims?

Now, I needed a crime. I got it when Joe Kozmarski discovered the body of an aging nun who once spent time at the lounge:

> On her belly, she had a big, fine-lined tattoo of a cat, its back arched, its tail raised like a furry S, its legs taut. The ink had faded, but the lines were sharp and clear. It looked like a cat in heat. Under the tattoo someone had scrawled two words in black marker: BAD KITTY.

The Bad Kitty Lounge came out in 2010. Still celebrating the publication, I went on vacation to Bermuda and stayed at a resort that offered a full complement of intimate massage services. The massage parlor—again relocated to Chicago—featured in my third Joe Kozmarski novel, *A Bad Night's Sleep*. Now that I also am setting crime novels in Jacksonville, I continue drawing from the places I go and the people I see. *Blue Avenue* takes its name from a street near a school my kids have attended. *Black Hammock* takes its name from an island where some friends live. But I'm still waiting for my next bad kitty—stumbling toward the dark.

MICHAEL WILEY is the Shamus Award-winning writer of the Daniel Turner thrillers and the Joe Kozmarski mysteries. Michael grew up in Chicago, where he sets his Joe Kozmarski mysteries,

and has lived for the past two decades in Jacksonville, Florida, where he sets the Daniel Turner thrillers. He teaches at the University of North Florida and, when he isn't writing, enjoys spending time with his family and traveling to faraway places. Find out more at www.michaelwileyonline.com.

MAX WIRESTONE

The Unfortunate Decisions of Dahlia Moss

In one sense, the origin of the Dahlia Moss books is the story of me, as a reader, getting irritated.

First off, before I name any names, I should say that it's really only the best authors that are capable of truly irking you. If someone is lousy and they start annoying you, you just stop reading. But good writers—really good writers, whether they be dramatic, or sexy, or funny—you have to keep going, right? You can't stop just because they're driving you mad. You have to find out what happens next.

My favorite writer of all time is Robertson Davies, who is utterly brilliant, but whenever gay characters appear in his fiction I want to reach through paper, time and space and throttle him. But no matter.

We come to Donna Andrews.

First, I love Donna Andrews. She's extremely funny, and she constructs fantastic little puzzle boxes of crime. Her *Some Like It Hawk* features one of the most clever locations for a mystery I've

ever run across. Seriously, put this book down and go order that now, if you haven't already.

But zOMG—every time a geek or nerd character shows up in one of her books, it's like fingernails across a chalkboard. It grates against my soul. Despite admitting that she herself is a nerd, she always sems so disapproving! I love her mysteries but I always get the impression that if she met me in life she would say, "What a sweet, sad wasteland of a man."

I'm a huge nerd. The biggest. I practically learned to read from comic books, and in my teen years I read more *Star Trek* novelizations than you probably realize even exist. If you're familiar with the board game *Dominion* (which you'd have to be a considerable geek to even know about) you'll find that *I am thanked in the credits*. I have nerd cred for days.

But dear god do I love mysteries. My parents were both huge fans of the genre, and I have the warmest memories of visiting used paperback bookstores with them. I'm not even sure places quite like that exist anymore. Little caves filled with shag carpeting that smelled like mildew and cat pee and cigarette smoke. We'd dive in, searching through huge yellowed stacks of paperbacks, and dredge up dog-eared books by Ngaio Marsh, and Erle Stanley Gardner, and John D. MacDonald and Rex Stout, and we'd haul them to the counter like we'd found gold.

We kind of had.

I adored those paperback writers from my youth. Their books were pulpy and strange and perfect and wonderful, and I read them all—despite the fact that so many of their covers inexplicably featured buxom girls in bikinis, which doesn't do much for a budding gay guy.

But my point is, mysteries. They were in my blood from the get-go, Donna Andrews. Even bikini-clad women could not deter me from reading them.

As I got older, I started to notice more and more that certain cozies—and I'm not just talking about Ms. Andrews here—made me feel a little unwelcome. Like I was being made fun of. Geeks in many mysteries are someone's goofball husband or emotionally stunted boyfriend. Man-children who only exist to solve computer problems. Or people who understand video games, but not social interaction. You've heard the terms: Cave dwellers. Neckbeards. Weirdos.

I felt like I was being told that the genre I loved wasn't for me, anymore.

This was Roberston Davies all over.

And so I wrote *The Unfortunate Decisions of Dahlia Moss*. Not out of anger—not at all—but because Everyone Was Getting It Wrong. Geeks are cool, fun, interesting people. They're smart and quirky and enthusiastic. They wear clothes ironically. And when they get together—lemme tell ya, man, it's a party.

And okay, sure, there's the odd weirdo, but as a small-town librarian, I've hosted knitting circles for ten years. There's the odd weirdo there as well. Don't pretend you don't know who I'm talking about. But we don't judge quilters or knitters by their weirdest members, do we? Of course not. *Because that would be dumb.*

The other thing about geeks? They're not all teen-aged white kids. White male teenagers are a minority! Have you been to a ComicCon lately? Fully half the people there are women. There are people of

all ages, all races. Geek culture is not what it used to be. It ain't 1985 anymore.

I wanted a whodunit that reflected that. So I started. My working title was "A Cozy for Geeks," and that was exactly how I approached it. As I went along, I discovered I wasn't writing a cozy so much as a caper, because the characters in the book were not at all keen on the cozy rules of "no drinking, no cursing." Especially the drinking, because Dahlia Moss features *Thin Man* levels of booze consumption.

But yikes, was that a fun book to write.

I got to put all the things I loved together. There are references to Raymond Chandler, and Ngaio Marsh and Jessica Fletcher—as well as *StrongBad* and *Doctor Who* and *Dungeons and Dragons*. And the crazy thing was: it worked. Like a song. It's like I threw a party and invited all of my favorite people—many of whom had never met—and discovered that they were made for each other. Or at least, they were after a couple of drinks.

So the next time you're reading a great mystery and the author makes a left turn that you can't abide—maybe it's an opportunity. Heck, maybe it's a calling. Who knows, maybe one day you'll be reading one of my books, and you'll think, Max Wirestone, that dunderheaded fool—he really hasn't the slightest idea about [bird fanciers/speakers of Urdu/principals of accounting/etc.]. And rather than tweeting to me, or grousing to a spouse (who in my experience, isn't listening anyway), you can put pen to paper instead and get a book deal out of the matter.

It's happened before.

A graduate of Washington University in St. Louis, **MAX WIRESTONE** spent his twenties as a librarian-nomad, crossing the United States and shelving (and reading) a lot of books along the way. Moving to New England, he became the director of a small-town library, where he unites his love of books, mysteries, and geekery; teaches small children how to dust for fingerprints; helps teens and tweens build competitive Lego Mindstorm robots; and serves as his town's definitive source on how to pronounce character names in *Game of Thrones*. Max, his editor husband and their son live in an old house filled with toys, games, and blasts of cold air. His debut novel, *The Unfortunate Decisions of Dahlia Moss*, appeared in 2015. Max is busy working on Dahlia Moss's next adventure. That, or he's just playing Hearthstone. Find Max online at www.maxwirestone.com.

MICHAEL ZOLEZZI

Hide and Seek

I have worked for the Los Angeles Police Department for over 20 years. During my early years on patrol, I started to become jaded and a little detached from the community that I served. It affected not only me, but also everyone around me. Ask my wife. I desperately needed an outlet to take me away from what I saw every day, an escape from the reality of the streets. I could not believe what human beings did to one another.

I've always loved writing and dreamed of authoring a great novel. Perfect. I had my outlet. I would become a writer. What now? Well, I winged it, not really knowing how to structure a story. After several months of throwing words on paper, I completed my first-ever manuscript. Excited, I sent it out to every person who might possibly consider it for representation or publication. It was promptly rejected by every agent and publisher, and rightfully so. I had so much to learn.

Not being a quitter, I continued to write, this time in the screenplay medium. Early on, I received some encouraging comments from several major studios, which made me think, *I don't completely suck at this authoring business*. The words of encouragement from people in the know convinced me to keep at it. I dreamed that maybe one day my stories would be on the big screen.

As my storytelling progressed, life changed for the better, and I started a family. Writing would have to take a back seat to my children. After a several-year hiatus, I was promoted to detective, which afforded me the opportunity to take the train to work. Again I could satisfy my need to write. This time around, I focused on drawing from the world that I knew, my police world. First up I penned an early version of *Hide and Seek*, which did well in several screenplay contests. I knew I found my niche. Write what you know, stupid, right?

Then Christopher Dorner happened. I was the last person in the department to deal with the troubled former LAPD Officer. While I can't speak about what my dealings with him were due to the confidentiality of the matter, the interactions were cordial. When I heard about his manifesto, I didn't feel threatened; in fact he mentions me in his ramblings in somewhat of a positive light. However, the Department felt it was wise to send a protection detail to my residence. That may have saved my family's life. In the early morning hours, officers assigned to protect me and my family ran into Dorner down the street from my house. The ensuing gun battle left an officer injured with a grazing gunshot wound to his head. The following days would become the biggest manhunt in the LAPD's history. All

the while my family and I were prisoners in our own house. Oh, how we take our freedom for granted.

The sociopath that Dorner was inspired the creation of the published version of *Hide and Seek*. His soul is in my antagonist.

Working at Robbery Homicide Division (RHD), I handled some of the biggest and most complex cases that came an investigator's way. I wanted my novel to show a reader what it's like being in the detective's shoes as a high profile case unfolds.

There are certain criminal cases that are talked about generations after the investigation is closed. I'm talking about the big ones: O.J. Simpson, Scott Peterson, and the Grim Sleeper type of investigation, the big-news media giant of a case. They are biopsied, broken down, with every move by the detective analyzed. These cases can make legends or goats out of the investigators.

In *Hide and Seek*, such a case lands in the laps of my fictional detectives, Jake Skinner and his partner, Detective Dan Rico. Having just transferred from South Bureau Homicide, Jake thought taking down an armed bank robber on his first day was as wild as the RHD ride got. He was wrong.

In my story, the kidnapping of the wife of the mayor of Los Angeles, who also happens to be a federal prosecutor, threatens the core of one of the world's most famous cities. An internal power struggle, false leads, meddling media, the victim's own family, and Jake's personal struggles all threaten to derail the investigation, an investigation that leads to pure evil.

There are many obstacles in every major investigation. Everyone wants to have his or her hands in the mix. The bigger the case, the

more distractions the investigating officer will face. The subplots of my story deal with all these distractions. I hope the reader of my novel comes out the other end with a greater understanding of detective work and all that goes in to criminal cases.

MICHAEL ZOLEZZI is a Los Angeles Police Department 20-year veteran and a detective supervisor. His past assignments have included a stint on Internal Affairs and encompassed the fight against gangs, narcotics, sex crimes, and cold cases. Michael has a B.S. in Criminal Justice from San Diego State University. His experiences with the LAPD inspired him to write *Hide and Seek*, a crime thriller. An active member of the International Thriller Writer Association, he lives in the Los Angeles Area with his wife and two children. Find him at www.michaelzolezzi.com.

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FRANCES BRODY has written eight mysteries set in the 1920s, featuring elegant and intrepid Kate Shackleton, World War I widow-turned-sleuth. *Murder in the Afternoon* was named a Library Journal best book. Frances, a 2016 Mary Higgins Clark finalist for *A Woman Unknown*, began her writing career in BBC

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ELIZABETH BRUNDAGE graduated from Hampshire College, attended NYU film school, was a screenwriting fellow at the American Film Institute in Los Angeles, and received an M.F.A. as well as a James Michener Award from the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop. She has taught at a variety of colleges and universities, most recently at Skidmore College, where she was visiting writer-in-residence. *All Things Cease to Appear* is her fourth novel. She lives near Albany in upstate New York. Find her at www.elizabethbrundage.com.

ELIZABETH BUHMANN is originally from Virginia, where her first novel, *Death Lay at Her Door,* is set; like her main character, she lived several years abroad while growing up. She graduated *magna cum laude* from Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts, and has a PhD in Philosophy from the University of Pittsburgh. For twenty years she worked for the Texas Attorney General as a researcher and writer on criminal justice and crime victim issues. Elizabeth now lives in Austin, Texas, with her husband and dog. She is an avid gardener, loves murder mysteries, and is a long-time student of Taiji Quan. Find her online at www.elizabethbuhmann.com.

NANCY J. COHEN writes the humorous Bad Hair Day Mysteries featuring hairstylist Marla Shore. Titles in this series have made the IMBA bestseller list and been selected by *Suspense Magazine* as best cozy mystery. The author of over 20 published novels, Nancy has also written *Writing the Cozy Mystery*, a valuable instructional guide on how to write a winning whodunit. A featured speaker at libraries, conferences, and community events, she is listed in *Contemporary Authors, Poets & Writers*, and *Who's Who in U.S. Writers, Editors, & Poets*. Follow her on Facebook, Twitter and other social media, and find out more on her website, www.nancyjcohen.com.

Author, book consultant and publisher **SUZANNE FOX** is the creative director of Stories of You Books and the founder/editor of the online journal *Society Nineteen*, which interviews contemporary authors writing about 19th-century experience. Her books include the memoir *Home Life: A Journey of Rooms and Recollections*, which was published by Simon and Schuster and selected as an Editor's Choice by the *Chicago Tribune*, and women's fiction that has been published under two different pseudonyms and translated into seven languages. The editor of the Stories of You anthologies and a frequent teacher and speaker on writing, stories and creativity, Suzanne lives in Florida and is currently working on a novel set in 19th-century Britain. Find out more at www.storiesofyou.org.

CHRIS GOFF is the award-wining author of international thrillers and the Birdwatcher's Mystery series. Her debut thriller, *Dark Waters* (Crooked Lane Books, September 2015), set in Israel amid the Israel-Palestine conflict, has sold international rights and been released in audio by Blackstone Audio. The bestselling Birdwatcher's Mystery series, which she writes as Christine Goff, has been a finalist for two WILLA Literary Awards and a Colorado Author's League Award and has been published in Japan. Astor + Blue Editions publishes her Birdwatcher backlist. Book #6, *A Parliament of Owls*, appeared in May 2016. Goff's second thriller, *Red Sky*, is set in Ukraine and is due out in 2017. Find out more at www.christinegoff.com.

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Born in Ireland, **ANDREW HUGHES** was educated at Trinity College, Dublin. It was while researching his acclaimed social history of Fitzwilliam Square—*Lives Less Ordinary: Dublin's Fitzwilliam Square, 1798-1922*—that he first came across the true story of John Delahunt, which inspired his debut novel. Andrew's second novel, *The Coroner's Daughter*, will appear in the UK in February 2017. Andrew lives in Dublin.

D.E. IRELAND is a team of award-winning authors, Meg Mims and Sharon Pisacreta. Friends since college, they enjoyed separate writing careers in romantic suspense and westerns before deciding to collaborate on a series based on George Bernard Shaw's delightful play *Pygmalion*, which inspired the musical *My Fair Lady*. In addition, they each write cozy mysteries for Kensington under the pen names Sharon Farrow and Meg Macy. Sharon's Berry Basket series debuts with *Dying For Strawberries* in October 2016, while the first book in Meg's Teddy Bear series will be launched in Spring/Summer 2017. Find out more about their work as D.E. Ireland at www.deireland.com.

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MARY LAWRENCE lives in Maine and worked in the medical field for over 25 years before publishing her debut mystery, *The Alchemist's Daughter* (Kensington, 2015). The book was named by *Suspense Magazine* as a "Best Book of 2015" in the historical mystery category. Her articles have appeared in several publications, most notably *Portland Monthly Magazine* and the national news blog The Daily Beast. Book 2 of the Bianca Goddard Mysteries, *Death of an Alchemist*, appeared in February 2016, and *Death at St. Vedast* releases in 2017. Visit her online at www.marylawrencebooks.com.

GRANT MCKENZIE is the internationally published author of five edge-of-your-seat thrillers, plus an ongoing mystery series set in San Francisco. His latest novel, *Speak The Dead*, was named one of the Best Books of 2015 by *The Strand Magazine*. His riveting thrillers are available from Polis Books. Under the pen name M. C. Grant, he writes the Shamus-short-listed Dixie Flynn series from Midnight Ink. As a multi-award-winning journalist, Grant has worked in virtually every area of the newspaper

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Born and raised in Brooklyn, **JOHN MACKIE** grew up imagining himself wearing a Dodger uniform and playing third base. When the fantasy of youth faded into reality, he became a New York City policeman, discovering that he would rather be a New York City cop than a third baseman for any ball club . . . well, almost. During his 17 years with the NYPD, he was decorated over 30 times and awarded the prestigious Medal of Valor. Since work-related injuries forced him into early retirement, he has published five Thorn Savage novels. John now makes his home in Florida. Find out more at www.mackiej.com.

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Author **TOBY NEAL** grew up on the island of Kaua`i in Hawaii. After a few stretches of exile to pursue education, the islands have been home for the last sixteen years. Neal's career in clinical social work informs the depth and complexity of the characters in her books. Neal is the author of more than a dozen novels in the mystery and young adult genres and the bestselling Lei Crime Series, which debuted in 2011. In 2015 Amazon launched the Lei Crime Kindle World, which allows authors to build licensed fan fiction upon Neal's works, and she's sold over a million books collectively. Neal's books have won the 2015 Independent Publisher Book ("IPPY") Award in Best Mystery/Thriller for *Twisted Vine* and the 2015 National Indie Excellence® Award in the Best Multicultural Novel category for *Torch Ginger,* among other honors. You can find her at www.tobyneal.net.

CHRIS NICKSON was born and raised in Leeds. He has a love affair with the city, exploring it in fiction over several different periods. A crime writer and music journalist, he spent 30 years in the US, many in Seattle, before returning to the UK, finally settling contentedly just a mile from where he grew up. In novels he writes the places and people he feels in his bones. With music he prefers the paths that aren't as well trodden, that lead to other

parts of the globe. Find out more about Chris's work at www.chrisnickson.co.uk.

ANN PARKER earned degrees in Physics and English Literature before falling into a career as a science writer. The only thing more fun for her than slipping oblique Yeats references into a fluid dynamics article is delving into the past. Her Silver Rush historical mystery series is set in the silver boomtown of Leadville, Colorado, in the early 1880s and has been picked as a "Booksellers Favorite" by the Mountains and Plains Independent Booksellers Association. A member of Mystery Writers of America and Women Writing the West, Ann lives with her husband and an uppity cat near Silicon Valley, whence they have weathered numerous high-tech boom-and-bust cycles. Find Ann online at www.annparker.net.

ELIOT PATTISON is the author of eight Inspector Shan mysteries, most lately *Soul of the Fire. The Skull Mantra*, which debuted the series, won the Edgar Award and was a finalist for the Gold Dagger. He is also the author of the Bone Rattler mystery series, set in the mid-18th century, and the postapocalyptic mystery novel *Ashes of the Earth*. An international lawyer by training, Pattison is a world traveler who has spoken and written extensively on international issues. Pattison resides in rural Pennsylvania with his wife, three children, two horses, and two

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DR. MICHAEL RANSOM is a molecular pharmacologist and a globally recognized expert in the field of pharmacogenomics. He is widely published in scientific journals and has edited multiple textbooks in biomedical research. He is a pharmaceutical scientist and an adjunct professor at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine. Raised in rural Mississippi, he now makes his home in northern New Jersey. His novel *The Ripper Gene* has been called "scary as the devil" (Suspense Magazine) and hailed as both "a spectacular debut" (Providence Review) and a "smart, sophisticated murder mystery" (Killer Nashville). Interested readers can learn more at www.michaelransombooks.com.

Novelist, journalist and celebrity ghost writer **HOLLY ROBINSON** is the author of several books, including *The Gerbil Farmer's Daughter: A Memoir* and the novels *The Wishing Hill, Beach Plum Island, Haven Lake,* and *Chance Harbor*. Her newest novel, *Folly Cove*, appeared from Berkley Publishing Group/Penguin Random House in early October 2016. Holly's articles and essays appear frequently in publications such as *Cognoscenti, The Huffington Post, More, Parents, Redbook* and dozens of other newspapers and magazines. She and her husband have five children and a stubborn Pekingese. They divide their time between Massachusetts and Prince Edward Island, and are crazy enough to

be fixing up old houses one shingle at a time in both places. Connect with Holly on Facebook, Twitter and visit her website at www.authorhollyrobinson.com.

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BARBARA ROSS is the author of the Maine Clambake Mysteries, *Clammed Up, Boiled Over, Musseled Out* and *Fogged Inn*. *Clammed Up* was nominated for an Agatha Award for Best Contemporary Novel and was a finalist for the Maine Literary Award for Crime Fiction. Barbara blogs with a wonderful group of Maine mystery authors at Maine Crime Writers and with a group of writers of New England-based cozy mysteries at Wicked Cozy Authors. Barbara and her husband own the former Seafarer Inn at the head of the harbor in Boothbay Harbor, Maine. For more on Barbara and her work, visit www.maineclambakemysteries.com.

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LYNN SHOLES and **JOE MOORE** are the #1 Amazon and international bestselling authors of *The Blade, The Shield, The Tomb, Thor Bunker, The Phoenix Apostles, The Grail Conspiracy, The Last Secret, The Hades Project*, and *The 731 Legacy*. Find them online at www.sholesmoore.blogspot.com.

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National bestselling and award-winning author **JOANNA CAMPBELL SLAN** has written 30 books, including both fiction and non-fiction works. Her nonfiction has been endorsed by Toastmasters International, her first novel was shortlisted for the

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Southern author **MAGGIE TOUSSAINT** loves writing mysteries. She's published twelve novels in mystery and romantic suspense. Under the pen name of Rigel Carson, she's published three dystopian thrillers. *Bubba Done It*, book two in her Dreamwalker series, is her latest mystery release. The next Dreamwalker book, *Doggone It*, appears in October 2016. She also writes and publishes short stories and novellas. She's a board member for Southeast Mystery Writers of America and Low Country Sisters In Crime. Visit her at www.maggietoussaint.com.

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A graduate of Washington University in St. Louis, **MAX WIRESTONE** spent his twenties as a librarian-nomad, crossing the United States and shelving (and reading) a lot of books along the way. Moving to New England, he became the director of a small-town library, where he unites his love of books, mysteries, and geekery; teaches small children how to dust for fingerprints; helps teens and tweens build competitive Lego Mindstorm robots; and serves as his town's definitive source on how to pronounce character names in *Game of Thrones*. Max, his editor husband and their son live in an old house filled with toys, games, and blasts of cold air. His debut novel, *The Unfortunate Decisions of Dahlia Moss*, appeared in 2015. Max is busy working on Dahlia Moss's next adventure. That, or he's just playing Hearthstone. Find Max online at www.maxwirestone.com.

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Vero Beach Book Center offer the inspiration of great author and book events and a model of what independent bookstores can be.

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is Going to Happen, the blog of Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine, www.somethingisgoingtohappen.net.

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The essay by Wendy Tyson reprinted here first appeared on March 10, 2016 as a guest post on the Wicked Cozy Authors blog (www.wickedcozyauthors.com).

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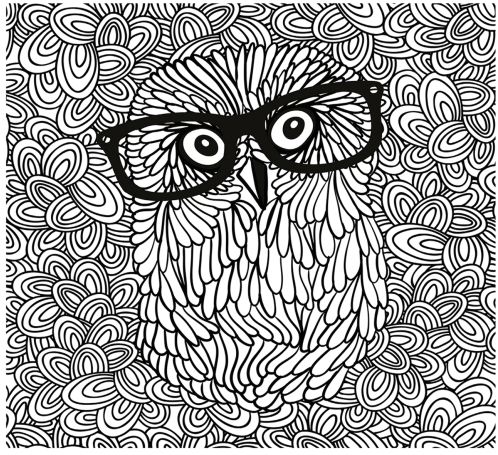
For more information, including upcoming publications and calls for submissions, please visit us at www.storiesofyou.org.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR EDITORS AND CONTRIBUTORS

Beginning in 2017, Stories of You Books will open some of its series to editorial proposals and some of its anthologies to contributor submissions. For information on upcoming editorial and contributor opportunities, please visit www.storiesofyou.org.



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