

*Billie A Williams,
Mystery Suspense author
Accidental Sleuths who solve crimes with
wit, wisdom and chutzpah*



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Hi,

I'm glad you requested this sampler of my books and I hope you will get as much fun reading them as I had writing them. I tried to include a brief note as to why, how and when I wrote them how they came to be. A writer's mind is sometimes quite different than the ordinary ☺

All of my books are tagged to one organization or another meaning that organization or charity will receive ¼ of the royalties I get for each book.

Death by Candlelight and Candlelight and Shadows = a donation to The Rainbow House Shelter for domestic abuse victims.

Skull Music = The local animal hospital and Dolphins at the Nature Conservancy/Ocean Conservancy

Watch for the Raven = the local 4-H clubs for boys and girls

The Pink Lady Slipper = local Rescue Squad

Bed and Breakfast Murders = the Amberg Volunteer Fire Dept. Rescue Squad

Knapsack Secrets (re-release date May 2008 – the first in the Secrets series) Homeless shelters

Small Town Secrets (release date January 2008) =TBA

Ghost Music of Vaudeville (release date November 2008) = TBA

Stay tuned for more excerpts and contests. Visit my website at www.billiewilliams.com for up dates

Visit my blogs at <http://printedwords.blogspot.com> or

<http://onewomansgarden.blogspot.com>

Video trailers I've made are available at <http://www.YouTube.com/basbleu43>

Feel free to pass this sampler on, print it out, put it on a disk and share it with others.

Giving is the only way to receive – and I give you wishes for health, wealth, happiness and prosperity. Please do send me any and all comments or questions at

billie@billiewilliams.com

Thank you!

Billie

Please let me know which books you purchased and I will send you a autographed book plate for it and some surprise goodies.

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Death by Candlelight is my first published full length novel. It began while I was sitting in my parked car enjoying the view of the Silverton Narrow Gauge railroad as it lumbered on its first run of the morning with a full compliment of tourist passengers on the long mountain trek to Silverton, Colorado.

As I sat there after the train had passed musing about the strength and courage of the people who first populated that wild mountain region, I noticed a young girl in tall Indian type moccasins crossing the weeded area between the main street and the railroad tracks apparently on her way to the stores on the other side of the block. Her long dark brown hair that hung nearly to her knees swayed back and forth with each step. She was very thing, her head was bowed as she watched where she put each foot as she stepped. My mind wanted to know her story. Was she an unwanted waife? She appeared to be. I pictured her as hungry, lonely, hurting. When I got home that night she became Danielle (a name I always planned to name my first daughter) Maynard a last name I chose out of the blue.

I wrote as though I interviewed her. I found out about the man she loved, the man who had turned so totally opposite of what she had thought — drug abuse, spousal abuse — it all began so slowly. I drew on my experiences working in counseling office at a community college for nine years and found out how her life had evolved.

She gains her strength from her determination. And her girlfriend tried to help her get free from the trouble she saw to no avail. Danielle becomes pregnant – and for a brief moment everything takes a turn for the best. When her husband is murdered—and she or her girlfriend could be prime suspects—she wonders if life will ever again be the same.

This book continues into *Candlelight and Shadows* as Danielle tries to make it on her own after her son is born. I hope you will gain some insight into the plight of women (or men) in domestic abuse situations and understand why just running is not an option. There are options, but it isn't always easy to utilize them or even know they exist. One quarter of my royalties that I make on these two books (*Death by Candlelight* and *Candlelight and Shadows*) is donated to the local domestic abuse shelter here. It is one way for me to support those that help the helpless

in our society.

~ ***Death By Candlelight*** ~ISBN 1-59088-133-8 (electronic)
1-59088-901-0

by

Billie A. Williams

One

"Bitch."

Danielle heard the profanity before she felt the blow to the back of her head, which knocked her sideways off her chair. Hot wax spilled with her, pouring across her arm and coating everything from table to floor like lava flowing from a volcano. With a brutal stroke of his arm, Randy swept the table clear of all her candles and supplies. The crash was deafening and heightened her pain. Randy didn't wait for her to recover. He grabbed her by one arm, picking her up like a pile of dirty rags. She landed with a thud against the doorframe. Pain shot up her side. She wouldn't scream. She wouldn't cry. She wouldn't give him the satisfaction. She glared at Randy.

"Next time I tell you to go get beer for my friends, you jump, understand?" Randy roared. He smashed the back of his hand across her face.

"Clean up this fucking mess and you before I get back or there will be hell to pay," he said, staggering out of the room. "You and your damn candles, that's all you think about. I'm sick of it."

The kitchen door slammed hard enough to rattle the windows. Tears streamed down her face as she lay in a heap where she had fallen. Her body throbbed with pain. The hot wax on her arm had cooled to a warm paste but the burning sensation intensified. She pulled herself into a sitting position and took stock of all the parts where she hurt. Nothing felt broken, not this time anyway. She crawled over to where the wax for her latest batch of candles puddled on the bright red and gray tiles of the craft room floor. Still in a dazed half-conscious state of mind, she began peeling and scooping wax back into the kettle and turned off the hot plate. Tears clouded her vision. "*Where have all the flowers gone . . .*" she began singing in a quiet bird-like voice.

Running out to get beer for him and his cronies disgusted her. She hoped ignoring him would work, hoped that everyone would leave and he would pass out. This latest party was running into the third day. *How long can he last?* Usually after he woke up from an extended drunk, Randy would be apologetic and doting, loving her as though he meant it. She had fallen in love with that Randy. No such luck this time, this time he seemed to gain energy from the violence against her. There was a silence when all Randy's friends left; the hollow silence, now that Randy had left too, seemed ominous. "I should have

known better," she sobbed, tears spattering in the soft wax coating the floor. Outside, the Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad Train moaned with the familiar cry like the howl of a gray wolf that searched for its mate. It echoed Danielle's pain. "*Yesterday, all my troubles seemed so far away...*" The words and music crashed through her mind flooding her thoughts with memories.

The loving relationship she once enjoyed had now turned dark and sinister. He used to be fun. Now, she no longer knew the man she was living with. He was increasingly more violent. Anything would trip his hair trigger temper and set him off. *How long will it be before he kills me?* The thought made her shudder.

Danielle knew Randy could be back in an hour if he went to the Billy Goat Saloon where all the bikers hung out or he could take off on his Harley and be gone for days. She never knew for sure when he left like this.

They had only been together a year the first time he left and she had missed him with a passion. Worried sick about him for four days, she'd tortured herself with guilt and *what ifs*, waiting for him to return. When he finally did come home, he had found her waiting for him eager to forget the fight that had caused him to slap her around. Later he apologized and said he would never do it again. She had believed him. After all, he had not really beaten her, at least not that time; he had just slapped her and shoved her down. As she thought about the accelerating violence, the time he broke her arm seemed long ago. That had scared her. He did take her to the emergency room the next day when he was sober. "Tell them you fell down the stairs," he said.

The emergency room personnel were not inclined to believe that story and she had to do some tall talking to convince them it was nothing more than a clumsy accident. Maybe that time it *was* her fault, if she hadn't made him mad, maybe that wouldn't have happened. She shouldn't have nagged him about getting a job. That time when she asked, he told her he had gone for a ride to sort things out. "What did that mean?" He told her to keep her nose out of his business. She never asked again. Now, as her body ached with pain, remembering his apologies after each new outburst of violence, she wondered if his promise to never do it again meant the beating or the running away. The answer was all too clear recently.

The day she met him he came into the Office Bar & Grill wearing faded blue jeans and a faded blue chambray work shirt. His deep brown hair and mahogany brown eyes swept her off her feet. He was her first encounter with a cowboy, Stetson hat, boots and all. She got shivers just thinking about the tall, lean cowboy with the slow drawl and easy manner. His smile caused butterflies in her stomach or perhaps lower. And it still did.

After her shower, Danielle laid across the bed to rest her aching body. She started to dream almost immediately.

She was in a dark tall house that seemed sandwiched between the other houses in a dusty coal town. Her father didn't have a job and the family was barely surviving. Sometime early in the morning, she awoke to the sound of her parents fighting again. She heard her mother scream and rushed into their bedroom. Sunlight snuck red through the cheap gauze curtains. Traffic grumbled outside on the street. Danielle heard the short agitated blasts of the coal train whistle as it rumbled along the tracks a block away. The windows rattled with its passing. She hated the train that disturbed their foundation four times a day. Its angry wail and dirty puffs of coal dust turned the snow gritty black within hours of falling pristine white. The train seemed to punctuate the black trouble of their lives here.

Father was in bed; anger and hate darkened his already black eyes. Her mother was on the floor holding the back of her head, tears streamed down her face. Her hair was disheveled, her face ashen. Clothes tossed on a chair beside the bed looked like a deflated scarecrow. The bed covers, dragged to the floor, surrounded mother's thin frame.

"Get out, get out of this room. You don't belong in here." Her father snarled at her.

"It's okay honey. Go on. I'm okay," mother said

"She'd be fine if she got her lazy ass out of bed and got some breakfast. She's nothing but a lazy bitch," her father said throwing a pillow at her mother.

"Leave her out of this," her mother retorted and then cowered as he raised a boot to throw.

She shivered with fear for her mother.

Danielle woke up sweating and hating herself for being weak like her mother. The dream was from years ago. It seemed like forever since she had last seen her parents. Things hadn't always been like that. After they moved again things got better. When her father wasn't drinking things were pretty normal. She could still see her father's brown/black eyes, how they grew intensely black when he was angry. It was such a contrast to her blue-eyed, blonde mother. They made a great couple. His drinking finally killed him at the age of fifty-five. Her mother had died a few months later. Danielle guessed her mother couldn't live without her father. Their relationship had been stormy but they always loved as passionately as they fought. She missed her mother. She needed her advice. She needed her companionship. There was no one to tell her secrets to anymore. Certainly, no one she could tell about Randy and his tirades.

***Candlelight and Shadows* ~ISBN 1-59088-364-0 (Electronic)
1-59088-676-3 (Print) Sequel to Death by Candlelight**

by

Billie A. Williams

Mona Labella stormed into Sandy's office, slamming the open door into the wall like a hurricane unleashed. "What the hell you bothering my friends for? You got a problem with me, you come stick your nose in my face and tell me."

She was yelling at the top of her raspy male voice. Sandy looked up and tried to imagine what possessed her to come charging into his office like a bull in a china shop. She slammed her fist down on the desk, uttering a few well chosen expletives. A couple of detectives from the outer office came rushing in as she ranted. Sandy held up his hand to them to hold off.

"Excuse me, Ms. Labella, is it?" Sandy asked, getting up from his desk. "Was there something I could help you with?"

"You know damn well what I'm talking about. Horn told me you came throwing your weight around his place this morning, making the neighbors think there was a major drug bust going on over there. What's up with that--you want me, here I am, what the fuck you want?"

Sandy waved the extra men out of his office and shut the door. "I wanted to ask you some questions about your whereabouts for the past week or so." Sandy said, motioning for her to sit in the chair across from his desk.

"I ain't sitting 'cause I ain't staying. Are you arresting me?"

"No, merely asking if you would be so kind as to answer a few questions for me. If you sit for a few minutes maybe we can clear some of this up. Could I get you coffee, a soda, anything?"

"Can I smoke in here? 'Cause if I can't I'm outta here."

"I'll get you an ashtray. Anything else?" Sandy said, reaching into a file drawer and pulling out an ashtray.

"Yeah, coffee if you don't mind."

Sandy noticed her tone mellowed considerably. He left and brought her back a steaming mug of coffee. "Forgot to ask if you wanted anything in it," he said as he handed it to her.

"Not unless you got a bottle of Jack Daniels in your desk there," she said, grinning. When she smiled Sandy noticed she had a mouth full of beautiful teeth and she was quite attractive.

"Do you know Danielle Ord?" Sandy asked, watching her closely to see her reaction to the question.

"Hell, yeah. Poor kid, her husband was murdered--that was Ruth Ord's brother."

"And Ruth Ord, you know her, too?"

"I worked for the woman for nearly a year. That woman was a real go-getter. Too bad her family didn't give her the respect she deserved. Too bad that crazy-assed brother of hers had to steal all her rightful heirship."

She took a long drag on her cigarette and Sandy saw her face slump back into the angry scowl that she'd been wearing when she came in. The word heirship hung in the back of his mind. She made an effort to sound sophisticated with that word and it only made her sound comical, but he didn't dare laugh at it. She was dead serious.

"Do you know anyone who would want to hurt Danielle or her son?"

"That little boy? Who would hurt him? With his precious mop of brown hair he looks a lot like his daddy. Or maybe more like Ruth--she had really nice brown hair and the truest blue eyes I ever saw."

Sandy listened with interest. *When had she seen David? How would she know the color of his eyes?* He was becoming more leery of this woman every minute. "Where were you Monday morning?"

"Monday? Well since I work every day of the week, I'd have to say I must have been at work." She said, stamping her cigarette out in the ashtray and grinding on it like she was erasing a stubborn stain on something.

"Where do you work now?" he asked. He didn't dare ask her if she had any witnesses, though he wanted to.

"Over at Brady foundry in the village," she said. "I'm a gofer because they figure a woman can't do a job as good as a man. I bet I could set up those machines with the best of them tight-assed males." She spat the words out like so much tobacco juice in a spittoon.

"What shift do you work?" Sandy asked being cautious trying not to provoke her anger again.

"There's only two shifts there--nights and days. They rotate you, one month it's days next month it's nights."

"Which shift were you on last week?"

"Nights, eleven p.m. to seven a.m."

"How many days a week do you work?"

"How damn many days are there in a week? They don't care if you got a life outside of work or not. They expect you to work seven days a week, eight hours a day. No excuses."

"I thought there were laws you couldn't work more than thirteen days in a row without a day off."

"Better tell that one to OSHA, 'cause I doubt Brady knows about it. No siree bub, with those guys, it's seven days a week, every week until you die or quit."

"You were working there last Monday evening, correct?"

"Ain't that what I told you? You hard of hearing or something?"

She was becoming more and more defensive. Sandy figured he could check her work records rather than make her suspicious. He didn't have enough to hold her, but he managed to get her fingerprints, thanks to the coffee cup he had brought her. He would see if the prints were a match.

"Sorry, I forgot I had already asked you that question," he said trying to appear flustered and a little dull.

"That all you wanted?" she asked, standing up.

"That will do for now. But, I wonder if you would mind leaving me a phone number or address where I could reach you in case something comes up."

"I don't got a place right now. I'm crashing with Horn and his old lady. I guess if you need me you'll have to get to them and they can relay a message to me."

Sandy walked to the door and opened it for her. "Thanks for coming in. If I need anymore information I will get in touch with you," he said.

He watched her wind her way through the maze of desks scattered about in the outer office. She had a swagger like some old cowboy. He figured she was only in her thirties, but life had left some deep scars on her. She walked with a stoop shouldered, left limp kind of gait, eyes on the floor and one arm clutching her purse as though it contained all her life and livelihood.

He snapped off the tape recorder that he had switched on under his desk when Mona Labella blew in through his door. *Yeah, illegal as hell*, he thought, *but when a crazy flies into your office you need evidence--you need a record. Besides, Beatrice Ord may be able to identify her voice from the tape, if so and if the fingerprints match, we can wrap up this case finally.* Sandy carefully picked up the coffee cup from his desk where she had set it and took it downstairs to the fingerprint lab.

"Hi, Mr. March. Jerry left an envelope for you--said he searched all the databases, couldn't come up with a match on those prints. Said to tell you he was sorry."

"Just so happens I have a mug here that may have fingerprints that match those. Want to take a look for me?" he asked the blonde woman working at the microscope on a slide covered in a powdery glaze.

She carefully took the cup from him with a gloved hand. "Give me a minute to dust it and transfer the prints to a slide. You realize as swamped as we are, I shouldn't be taking the time to do this."

"I do, I really do. If it wasn't so important I wouldn't dream of interrupting what you were doing. I will be forever in your debt if you can take a look for me."

"How does lunch sound as a means of erasing that debt?" she said giving him a smile that was meant to curl his toes, or at least raise some other part of his anatomy.

"I think that can be arranged," he said, knowing she had more than lunch on her mind for him. But he needed her help and if it would get this case cleared up, he was willing to play along with her for a while.

Sandy sat in one of the chairs and leaned the back of his head against the cool wall. He hoped he would finally get a break in this case. Somehow the small angry woman in his office seemed disjointed enough that she would think killing someone was justification for a perceived wrong. He doubted she would think twice about murder.

~ * ~

"Sorry about that, March," the blonde lab tech said as she handed Sandy the report; No conclusive match found--in bold letters across the top. "If the ones on the mug hadn't been so smeared I probably could have done better. I can't get you anything that would hold up in court from these, that's for sure."

"How would they have gotten so smudged?" he wondered aloud.

"All she had to do was rub the cup as she was holding it. Then we would have smudges instead of real prints."

Sandy tried to picture Mona Labella sitting across from him holding the cup in her hands. He smacked his head with the palm of his hand. "She did rub it--she jerked at one point and splattered a few drops of coffee and she wiped the cup afterwards."

"Of course, she wouldn't need to know we don't have any usable prints if you want to use that to eke some information from her, it might work," she said.

He thanked the lab attendant and told her he would call her to set up a lunch date when things settled down with this case. She said she would hold him to that.

Skull Music — The workings of a writer's mind is all this story is about. My nieces, a daughter and I embarked on a round robin. Our prompt to begin the writing was three words chosen at random – *X-ray, Dolphin, cassette tape with strange sounds*. We started, they gave up – I finished.

The twists were supplied by my imagination – the diminutive Arnold Beeblebox was a good insurance accountant. My experience at the time with hassling insurance companies led me to making them the bad guys. Revenge is sweet – and writer's can get away with murder. In essence Skull Music has nothing to do with the singing group — but everything to do with the insurance business that seems to live by devouring the little guy.

Charlie Wolfe is an investigative reporter that you will meet again in *The Ghost Music of Vaudeville* due to be released in November of 2008. She is a strong woman, of Native American heritage, with a gentle heart. I think you will want to follow her to the next book where she is joined by a little boy of my heart, Tommy, in a race to save an old Keith Theatre and the people who have played her stage – Piano Man is only one of the amazing characters Tommy befriends as he and Charlie try to save their homes and their memories.

Skull Music ~ISBN 1-59088-417-5 (electronic) 1-59088-618-6 (print)

by

Billie A. Williams

How earth shattering could something be in a murder investigation? You expect the worst and you usually get it. What kind of animal murders, anyway. Especially as gruesome as the three we've seen so far. The public is screaming for action. There seems to be no rhyme or reason to these senseless murders. Not that every murder isn't senseless, these I guess border on heinous.

Charlie pulled into the only available spot near the police department. Sam was a bit close to the edge, something was really wrong. When she called to find out how the investigation was going from his end, he almost came unglued. She was glad they were friends and he would give her current information.

Sam was out of his office talking to a couple detectives at their desks when Charlie entered the precinct. The clutter of desks and hum of the room reminded her of the newsrooms of several small town newspapers where she had worked. Desks that looked like hand-me-downs, papers and files piled high like dust rags, old lamps and coffee cups and behind it all perched some tired faces typing reports, some comparing notes, none laughing or carrying on nonsense conversations or gossip. She caused a stir as she walked through the room. *Reporter was synonymous with poison in a detective's office atmosphere*, she thought wanting to correct their opinion out loud as she walked through voices lowered to keep conversations private from the snooping press.

She caught Sam's eye and he motioned her into his office.

"Hope it's been awhile since you had breakfast," he said.

She sat in the only empty chair in the cluttered office across the desk from him. He pulled out a folder and sat down heavily as he handed it to her. "The X-ray we found in Henderson's car? We knew it wasn't a human skull, we were beginning to think it was alien. According to the FBI lab, it's a dolphin brain."

"A dolphin? What was Henderson doing with an X-ray of a dolphin brain?"

"We were able to track where it came from with the FBI's help. The doctor, witch doctor I'd say, but not in public company, is a firm believer in organ transplants, from pig hearts to dolphin brains. This guy is a regular Frankenstein."

"How does he tie in with Henderson? Was he after her body parts?"

"He says not. The good doctor says they were looking to transplant Henderson's brain with a dolphin brain because of the brain tumor, she apparently was not long for this world."

"Oh my God. Did she agree?"

"I don't know, but thinking of the consequences, you know dying in that kind of pain, she might have. We may never know the answer to that. From the skull music tape..."

"Wait, Skull music?"

"That's what the lab calls that cassette tape we found in the tape player of her car."

"I never heard about that."

"There wasn't much to hear. Sounded like a fan belt screeching or something, but the guys in the lab had heard it before. Now with a tag for the X-ray, it makes even more sense."

"How so?"

"Brain waves. For years scientists have been studying the electronic emissions from the brain. They also have been able to communicate with dolphins using this knowledge. The tape is the sound produced electronically from a brain."

"And the brain sounds like a squealing fan belt?"

"In this particular case, the lab said a terrorized brain."

"Okay, so let me see if I have the picture here. Professor Henderson has a brain tumor. Her brain's reaction to this tumor is terror. So some lunatic offers to replace her terrorized brain with a dolphin brain."

"You pretty much scoped the big picture."

"Do you actually believe this bullshit?" Charlie said, stunned by the implications of a mad scientist recording the various emotions of the brain. In order to do that he would have to elicit the emotions he wanted first. Terror was one of those emotions he wanted to record. How would you terrorize someone to record their brain's reaction? Charlie didn't want to know the answer to that question. The question that needed an answer was why. To further science wasn't enough of an answer for her.

Sam shrugged. "Until we come up with something better, this is what the guys who should know are telling me."

"And I can print this? You actually want the public to know this? Are they going to check out the doc's torture chambers to see how he comes up with his skull music? The other question I have is about dolphin brains. Where is he getting them? What are the animal rights' activists going to say about that one?"

"What about the human rights' activists? I see a lynch mob out to hang our good doctor if his name gets out."

"If he didn't want his name publicized, why send out an invitation?" Charlie said.

"You have a point."

"Is he connected to any research hospital or university? Has he done any papers for medical journals on his theories or practices?"

"None of that has any relevance for a police investigation."

"Excuse me? Okay try this. Has he tried his brain transplant on any humans? You may want to dig around, excuse the pun, to see if he has any bodies connected to him stored somewhere, buried somewhere."

"We are digging, Charlie. It's not like we don't know our jobs. So far nothing has shown up."

"I appreciate you bringing me in on this. Do we know if the doctor uses human body parts? I mean, would he be harvesting them for his experiments?"

"Interrogation is ongoing. We've had search warrants issued for his lab and home."

"So what you want me to do is publish this to ease the public mind about the serial killer threat because you have a likely suspect in custody?"

"Well, not exactly," Sam said.

"What not exactly?" Charlie questioned.

"He's not in custody. We have no evidence he's collecting human body parts," Sam said.

"His connection to Henderson isn't enough?"

"Airtight alibi for the time surrounding her death. Medical convention in Cincinnati," he said.

"What about Farmer, and the John Doe?" Charlie hated the term John Doe. The man had a life, he had a beginning, and he had ties. Why didn't anyone care enough to find out what they were? Maybe she needed to do that. She needed to get back to Mary Barber and get that name.

"We are checking his alibis for those now. Still a small piece on his connection could help to ease the public nervousness."

Charlie thought about that as she drove back to the Daily Globe. What would Abigail have to say about it? Would she allow the public to be misled? If she wrote a straight news story, she'd have to get it by Abigail. That woman was on the people's side, not into sensationalism as an excuse for journalism. She wasn't at all sure this would fly with her. Maybe a piece on the doctor with his experiments as an investigative piece might work.

Watch For The Raven began when my mother was very ill. Before I left to go home after spending the day with her, she commented about my writing and she said that when her grandfather started to tell a story he began every time with the same phrase. “When Tag was a pup, and turkey’s chewed tobaccy,”— and then the story would begin. When I got home that day I wrote the phrase down on a piece of paper – and later that year after she had passed on, I revisited the line and began to write.

The story seemed to flow from my pen totally formed. We had since moved from Wisconsin to Colorado. The history of the area Bayfield Durango/Four Corners area fascinated me. What an awesome place where bays and fields can self combust into fires with no origin; a place where the skies can be clear and lightening comes out of no where – as though a storm were playing hide and seek on the other side of the mountain shooting lightening as sport in other directions. One minute you may have a dash and splash of rain, the next a downpour of hail. Or a sprinkle of snowflakes dancing from the sky will suddenly turn into a major snow storm. Avalanches and wild fires – Colorado is a mind boggling place and this is where I wrote Watch For the Raven – but it was my mother’s words that acted as the prompt – I dedicate this story to her and to little boys everywhere.

**Watch For The Raven ~ISBN 1-59088-408-6 (electronic)
1-59088-635-6 (print)**

A Young Adult Historical Adventure

by

Billie A. Williams

A tall Indian, dressed in buckskin, slipped through the trees as silent as a breeze. He stopped where the arrow lay in the snow, the tip glistening in the sun. A shiver walked icy fingers up Josh's spine. He tried not to move or breathe. The tall, shadowy figure moved back in his direction looking for signs which way the deer had gone--or did he know Josh hid in the brush? Josh shivered at the thought. He closed his eyes and held his breath, peering out through a tiny slit. If the Indian came his way he was prepared to run for his life. Instead, the Indian slipped the arrow into his quiver. Then he sped off, barely making a sound in the packed leaves and snow covering the forest floor.

For a long time Josh lay in the brush hardly daring to breathe. He listened for any sound. Did the Indian leave or did he smell Josh? They had incredible powers Pa had told him. His friends at school talked about them finding game, where white men had already hunted, by the smell of fear. Josh sure felt fear; did he smell like it, too? That made him feel worse 'cause he was more afraid than he ever was. Did that Indian smell him? Was he lurking, waiting for Josh to run? He shivered; he was cold, hungry and scared out of his wits. There was no one to help him. Darkness fell like someone dropped a pail over the sun. It was a long moment before the moon washed the darkness with a milky glow. He uncurled from his tight huddle, stretching his stiff legs carefully so as not to disturb the brush too much. Then he flopped over on his belly and listened. Inch by inch he snaked out of his hiding place. Watching carefully with each forward motion, he scanned the deep brush for signs of the Indian. An owl hooted. It startled Josh so. He jumped without another thought about being seen; he shuddered and took off running. Night was no time to be alone in the deep woods. *Wild ferocious animals are everywhere*, he thought as he charged through the brush. He didn't want to think what might be lurking in the shadows, looking for an easy meal. Or where the Indian might be waiting to grab him.

Shielding his face from the brambles and oak brush with his arm, he ran. The brush now filled with shapes that looked like wild animals that clawed at his half-frozen face. He stumbled over rocks and fallen trees. He sped along, running, hoping by some chance he would run out of the woods and into the clearing by his home. He raced mindlessly until his chest hurt. There was a full moon up high now. It should have helped him find his way if he had been thinking proper; instead it cast an eerie glow. Nothing looked familiar. Josh didn't know which

direction home was or how far away it was. He wondered if the Indian tales he had heard were true.

The guys at school had said the souls of the dead lived in the wind of the trees. Was that what he heard whispering and squeaking? Was it spirits of the dead? Were they coming to get him? He had no idea what ghosts did with people they caught, but it couldn't be good. Maybe it was a coyote or some other wild animal hot on his trail. Could be a coyote, or a mountain lion, a grizzly. He had seen animals skirting the clearing, just outside the woods at home. They were chasing rabbits or deer across the field. *The woods must be full of them.*

Josh didn't have time to think, all he knew was he needed to keep going. His lungs hurt. "Can't stop now. Got to get home," he said. "Yeow!" he squealed as his foot snagged on a tree root and he stumbled. The stumble cost him his balance and Josh lost his footing on some wet leaves and skated, trying to keep upright. He toppled over like a dead tree felled by the wind. Down, down, down the hill he tumbled. Branches grabbed at him, scratching and slapping his face and arms. He felt a sharp pain as his head skipped from a tree trunk to a boulder. Ghostly, gnarled trees reached out for him as he rolled by them. Finally, he stopped rolling. Big bear shapes stood silent, watching him.

"Where, ow, where am I?" he said, trying to straighten himself out. *Are those wild animals?* he thought. "Oh, no. Whew, Don't see any eyes, they must just be boulders and trees. Oh, my head hurts," he said. Everything sort of swirled around him. Little sparks danced like fireflies in front of his eyes. His stomach churned.

Something warm and sticky was trickling down his face. Red stained the ghostly whiteness of moonlit snow. His forehead stung with pain. He felt it; a gash was oozing blood in quick spurts like his heart was beating. He tried to think. He needed to do something to stop the blood before some wild animal smelled it and came to get him. He pulled his bandana out of his pocket and folded it into a long strip and wound it around his throbbing head. How could he have been so stupid? Now, he was angry with himself but he knew he needed to stop the bleeding. He leaned back and took a long breath. What had he done? His panic had cost him. He should have...

The Pink Lady Slipper that follows began as a picture of a home we wanted to purchase in upper Michigan where one of my sisters lived. By the time she took the photo of that lovely sprawling log cabin, our hopes of ever owning the place were dashed. The roof had caved in from winter snows. The brother and sister that owned fought over release of it for sale —family troubles there—so Mother Nature claimed it.

The dream of it being our home did not fade. As we researched the history of the place, we found out it had quite a history. It was at one time or another; a stage coach depot, a brothel, a place where “Family” from Chicago and New York entertained, hid from the law, and practiced their bootleg operations. It was also an underground railroad for runaway slaves from the south. That seemed funny so far north but the history was there and the little town it was close to had tried for years to get rid of the place. It seems it outlasted those who lived through the years of its risqué and rowdy past. But, in *The Pink Lady Slipper* Trudy Moncha brings the old gal back to life – with dreams of turning it into a Bed & Breakfast. While her vision never materializes until the sequel – the “ladies” who share the history of the place entertained her with their antics. I hope you will find the place as inviting as I did.

The Pink Lady Slipper flower that my sister managed to get pictures of is a beautiful wild orchid that grows wild in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula and surrounded the property of the massive log house. It is a gorgeous, but deadly, plant. The address I used is of an actual house where my sister lived in that same area, whose address is “Zero Cemetery Lane”. Be forewarned, Orenda, the name of the town I used means Magical Powers [it is a make believe town]— And nothing is as it seems at *The Pink Lady Slipper*.

***The Pink Lady Slipper* ~ISBN 1-59088-424-8 1-59088-610-0 (print)**

by

Billie A. Williams

Trudy Moncha spun the barrel around checking every stave, every ring of the safety barrels that were placed about the rodeo center arena. She bounced the rubber mallet against the sides with a force similar to how a bull might hit it. She wanted to be absolutely sure that all the barrels were sound. Call her paranoid, if you will, but another defective barrel like the one Cyclone smashed to smithereens had nearly cost Trudy her life. That was no accident. There was no way it was going to happen again. Not to her, not to any other rodeo clown either, she thought massaging her game hip as she limped from one big barrel to the next.

The loud speaker bellowed “Trudy Moncha to the office trailer please.” The office trailer of the rodeo grounds supervisor sat out in the secured lot behind the rodeo grounds. As she limped to Kyle Houston’s trailer she wondered if maybe this was the day he told her to hang up her face paint and retire from the rodeo circuit. *And do what?* She thought, *entertain at kids’ birthday parties as a has-been rodeo clown?* What would she do if she couldn’t follow the rodeo in some capacity? It had become her life. Well, she’d have to cross that bridge when she came to it.

Kyle looked drawn and pale when Trudy entered the trailer. He handed her a telegram. “I’m sorry,” he mumbled his eyes downcast.

She shook as she took the telegram from him. Trudy didn’t like the look on the usually jovial man’s face. She wasn’t getting fired, but maybe that would have been easier to deal with than what awaited her. The language of the telegram’s cryptic bursts slashed at Trudy’s insides as though a knife ripped across her heart.

Mother dead, buried. Stop
Come home at once. Stop
Linda Stop
Call 555-1212 Stop.

The full weight of the rift between Trudy and her mother struck her like the weight of a rodeo bull on her back. How could she just up and die on her? Her emotions rode the bucking tide against the belief of what she read. Anger, anguish, rage flew at her like mud clods from a bronco’s hooves.

“Damn, damn, no!” she said kicking the chairs and tossing the telegram into the air. She retrieved the telegram from where it landed and read it again. “No!

No,” pain and sorrow gurgled out in a tear-filled, anguished cry that squeezed from her as though that bull sat on her chest this time. Sinking to the floor sobbing, “Nooo,” she cried out with the pain that tore at her life.

Kyle rounded his desk, reached down and drew Trudy up into his embrace. “I’m so sorry honey, so sorry. If I can do anything, anything at all...” He let his voice trail off knowing how useless any words were at a time like this. Instead, he held her and let her pour her grief out in a flood of tears that turned a dark blue stain on the pale blue of his shirt.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to come unglued Kyle,” she finally said.

Trudy hadn’t seen or heard from her mother in a year or more. If she’s dead and buried what more did they need of her? Why the urgency? Trudy’s mind raged. “How could they have buried mother without notifying me? Why hadn’t Linda or Paul called or telegraphed before this? I always sent an itinerary to mother so she would know where I was in case of a family emergency.” Even though they rarely spoke, Trudy made sure her mother could reach her. Obviously, her sister knew how to reach her, she’d reached her now. But, why did she wait until now?

“Can I use your phone?” she asked.

Kyle released her from his tight embrace and pushed the phone across the desk, “sure kid.” He sat back down behind his desk, fingers laced together over his rotund belly, as he leaned back in his chair and watched while Trudy dialed the phone number.

Numbly she pressed each key pad of her sister’s telephone number. “It’s Trudy. What’s going on?”

Linda told her they had already buried their mother. “She left you everything, except for her car and a stupid painting. You inherited everything! The family homestead and anything connected to mother. You better hurry and get here because The Lady Slipper is collapsing by the day,” Linda said.

Linda’s angry shouting caused Trudy to hold the phone away from her ear. Houston’s bushy gray eyebrows knotted together in a single line under his furrowed forehead, as what he heard reflected in his face.

“Why didn’t you call me sooner? Why didn’t you call me about the funeral? Was she ill--was it an accident? Why didn’t you let me know?” she said firing the questions at Linda like machine gun bullets. “Why would mother leave everything to me?”

“Why did Mother do anything? I’m sorry, I have no idea. She never confided in me,” came her sister’s sharp retort.

“I’ll be on my way back as soon as I can. Take care of things until I can get there, will you?”

Trudy hung up the phone. She slumped into the chair across the desk from Houston shaking her head. Tears welling in her eyes, she fought to keep them back.

“I inherited The Pink Lady Slipper. The homestead,” Trudy explained to Houston when he looked toward her with a quizzical expression on his face. “The building on the property was named The Pink Lady Slipper by the former owner and mother loved the name so she kept it. It used to be some kind of brothel or something. It isn’t really our homestead because the family only recently acquired it. What it actually is, is a rambling two-story log house, a carriage house and other small out buildings on a hunk of northern Michigan wilderness in Orenda.

“I thought you had a sister and a brother that lived with your mother,” he said.

“I do, I mean did. Why mother willed the property to me I don’t know. She knew I’m a grass roots type of person. Following the rodeo circuit suits me fine. I don’t need a house and property--roots. Why didn’t she give it to Linda or Paul? They would be much better able to take care of it than I am. They lived there while they were growing up. I never lived there long enough to remember it--well almost.

“Well, if you need time to go home and settle things you sure can have the time. Maybe this is a chance for you to get off that game leg before something really bad happens to you,” Houston said, almost as an after thought.

“I can’t imagine why she left it to me unless there was something...” she let the words hang in the air between them. *Something what--something wrong? Something sinister?* Her mind drifted to the short note she had received in her Easter card about ghosts stirring things up at the Lady Slipper and about not trusting Linda. That wasn’t unusual, Linda and she had never seen eye to eye since high school. Even then, her sister ran with the wrong crowd, did drugs and generally gave mother gray hair and headaches from constant battles and worry. “I don’t know what I’ll do yet. I need to think about it,” she said. “This is so unbelievable. She is--was, always so active. She was in perfect health according to what my sister and brother have written to me. I don’t understand how she could have just died.”

“Does anyone suspect foul play?” Houston asked.

The thought struck Trudy like the bull, Cyclone, smashing into her all over again. "Linda didn't say. She is just upset because I inherited everything. I can't blame her. I sure didn't ask for it. But, foul play? I can't imagine anyone wanting to hurt mother." *Except Linda*, the thought bumped into her conversation with Houston. She swallowed hard. "I can't think of anyone, but then, I haven't been into her life, or involved in what's happening with her, for quite a while."

Trudy left Houston's office and crossed the dusty parking lot to the fifth wheel trailer that was her home, as she followed the cowboys from rodeo to rodeo, protecting them from the things they challenged--she had been doing that since she'd married Doug. Before he was killed by that drunken rodeo clown's lack of interest, they were a rodeo team. She wanted to run, run and keep running until everything went away. Run until what she had just heard and read didn't exist anymore. How could her mother die? She wasn't ready for her to be gone forever. How will she ever apologize now for whatever it was that made them not speak to each other? Trudy let the tears spill onto the arid land--land as dry and empty as she felt.

She slumped into her overstuffed easy chair clutching the telegram. Angry tears spilled over onto her lap. "Why? Why couldn't you wait until Christmas so we could mend what was broken between us? You were too young to die. I needed you. Why? Why did you go and die on me?" She ranted at the dead emptiness of the trailer and suddenly, her life. The crumpled telegram in her hand, she shook it at the ceiling, as though she thought her mother watched her from above.

Trudy paced the small space she had been content to call home. How come her mother would leave her all her worldly possessions? Why wouldn't she give them to Linda? Linda was the one who was always there. Even though mother was afraid of her, she was there. I don't know why she was so afraid of Linda either. There is so much I don't know. Maybe that is why she is giving me all this so I will go home to find out the answers to all those questions. "How can I find out the answers if you're not there, Mom, answer me that if you will. Please." She collapsed again into a heap on her bed, then cried herself to sleep.

When she awoke it was dark. Stars twinkled through the skylight above her bed. It took her a minute to realize what had happened in the preceding hours hadn't been a dream--she was sure now. The questions were still the same in her mind. Why would her mother leave her everything? Why did she die? Why wasn't she notified that she was sick or that she had died so she could attend the funeral? She had to go back to Orenda, to find out.

Perhaps she would stay there. Anyway, she needed to retire after the last accident. Her limp slowed her down too much to keep ahead of the bulls. She

was putting the riders and herself in danger by staying on as a rodeo clown, when she wasn't capable of moving with the speed of a gazelle. Being small had its advantages, fitting into those barrels on the run was a simple deal for her. She could bounce into one of them without touching the sides, but that didn't keep the last bull from stomping on her and goring her when the barrel split. She was lucky to be alive. Houston's words from yesterday struck her then. She hadn't even heard them. He didn't fire her, he didn't lay her off, because of their friendship, she knew that. But what he had said yesterday ran in her mind now--he wanted her to find a reason to choose another lifestyle.

She wondered many times while she was healing how those staves had come off that barrel. Why it just blue apart when Cyclone hit it. She'd been in the same situation a dozen times and the barrels always held. The little redhead that wanted her place--perhaps. She had tried other things to get rid of Trudy and she had always chosen not to play her game. She ignored most of the pranks--but the barrel, could she have? The barrels were inspected after every rodeo and replaced if they were weak. That is why Trudy had taken it upon herself to check them now before every rodeo. No more weak ones would slip through to let that kind of thing happen to her or anyone else again, if she could help it.

Well, she decided it didn't matter now. What mattered now was that she go home to find out what had happened to her mother. Her gut told her it wasn't right, something was amiss. Why wasn't she notified until her sister realized that she had inherited everything except for that one painting that mother thought fit to leave to Linda? Too many unanswered questions. She would tell Houston in the morning that she was going home and probably wouldn't be returning to the rodeo. She hated to leave her friends, but she knew when enough was enough.

Her mind finally made up, Trudy began to pack and secure everything in the trailer. She would stop by the storage shed she'd rented in New Mexico on her way, to pick up the rest of her stuff. The south route was her choice anyway because the passes to the north were too dangerous this time of year. You never knew when you would be delayed for a day or two by an avalanche or winter storm. She figured she could be home in five days running if she slept only a few hours a night.

Bed And Breakfast Murders ~ISBN 1-5908-488-4 (electronic)
1-5908-705-0 (print) sequel to *The Pink Lady Slipper*

by

Billie A Williams

Trudy grabbed the edge of the table to steady herself as she stared in disbelief. She hadn't imagined it. The Amazon--the words stung her as they struck home. She also realized then she never even knew her name. A guest had died at the Slipper and she never even knew who the woman was.

Forms, shadows gathered around the body in the periphery of her view, she couldn't pull herself away from the sight of the gold handled knife standing there so regal in the woman's back.

"Call emergency rescue," a baritone room encompassing voice collided with her thoughts. Nothing seemed real. Not the voice, not the woman lying on the floor, not the gold handled dagger plunged deep between her shoulder blades--perhaps it was her scream she'd heard. Did she scream, or was it someone else, her own scream that still echoed in her head?

"Trudy, my God, Trudy," she heard Alexandra's voice outside the fog. Alexandra took her shoulders and forced her to turn away from the view of the body.

Unglued from the scene Trudy regained her composure. "Call nine-one-one. I must," her own voice sounded disjointed, hollow in her ears, "Yes, call."

"Here you sit, I'll call. Marquis, grab that afghan from the couch and put it over the woman, will you please?"

One of the shadow men leaned down to pull the knife from her back.

"No! Don't touch," Alexandra said as she dashed to the phone. Alexandra's face drained of color as though some one had pulled a drain plug. She shook the phone and pushed frantically at the disconnect button. Trudy knew in an instant the phone was as dead as the woman in the kitchen doorway.

"Now what?" she said.

Trudy sat staring at the men who stared back at her. None of them showed any emotion about the death. The thought struck her, *someone in this house is a murderer and I'm stranded here with them*. "We'll have to get Max and Jamison

to... no, that won't work, we can't jeopardize their lives. This woman is already dead, there is no help for her," Trudy said.

The noise from the living room reminded her the television was still on. Life went on as usually in the rest of the world. Once again things had stopped turning in her life, in Orenda, at Zero Cemetery Lane. She was beginning to wonder if Faith Yachne hadn't been right and The Slipper needed to be burned, not renovated.

Since none of the men seemed emotionally involved with this woman she reasoned one of them must have been the killer. "Will you all go back to what you were doing? Where you were before I screamed. There is nothing we can do for her. We will have Jamison and Max move her."

"I'll go get them," Alexandra said slipping back into her winter clothes.

Trudy wasn't sure she wanted to be left alone in the house with a murderer. "Okay," she said thinking her choices were extremely limited in this instance.

The shadow men retreated to the living room. "Maybe I can assist," Marquis said.

"Who is... was she?" Trudy asked.

"I'm afraid I do not know, dear lady."

"What do you mean you don't know?"

"Exactly that," his voice, baritone and booming, never moderated from a pleasant loudness and yet it filled the room much as a stage actor learns to project his voice. He offered nothing further.

The shadows merely stood a short distance off, soundless, emotionless. Time seemed frozen in that moment of discovery until Jamison and Max burst through the door.

"What in biddy hell, who offed the old bag?" Max said in his brutish manner. He never seemed to temper his words. He just blurted them out without apparent thought of their impact.

"I'm afraid we have no clue who off--stabbed Mrs., Ms, the lady."

Alexandra finished her snow dance and stood next to Trudy staring down at the big woman; blood had begun to ooze around the knife as Jamison turned her to check for pulse or breathing. "She's dead all right. How'd it happen? Who stabbed her?" he said looking around at the male guests.

“No one seems to know,” she turned to Alexandra “And get this, no one knows who she is... was.”

“Now wait a New York minute, I’m gullible, maybe even a little naïve, but...” she waved her hand toward the men. “They were traveling with her, weren’t they?”

“Yes and no,” said Marquis finally.

Jamison and Max lifted the body onto the tarp they brought in from the shed. “Where shall we put her?”

Trudy couldn’t bear the thought of sharing the house with another corpse, but until they could get the coroner and the police here she had little choice. “Let’s put her out in the summer porch bedroom. That way she will remain cool and won’t start to decompose as quickly. I’m sure Chief Hahn will have a million questions once we get through to him, and the knife will need to be fingerprinted.” Dread began to wash over her again as she realized yellow crime scene tape may once again decorate the rooms of the Slipper.

“Well, if no one knows who she is we need to go through her belongings to see if we need to notify someone, next of kin, whomever,” Alexandra said.

Trudy watched the two men carrying the Amazon woman like yesterday’s garbage. “Could you move her with at least a shred of dignity? She was, after all, a guest here.” *It would seem all the Slipper’s guests go out feet first*, she thought. Mother, Linda, Cilla and Pastor Black, John Wanita, though they weren’t all really guests, they were tied to the Slipper. What of all the skeletons in the dungeon, the bodies in the garden... “I should have known better,” she said aloud.

“Known what, that someone was going to be murdered here? Are you clairvoyant, too, now?”

“I think I should go back to being a rodeo clown. At least there I knew who my enemies were and where the danger was.”

“Didn’t stop that bull from busting you up though, did it?”

“The barrel was defective,” Trudy said.

“Yeah right! After someone defected it, it sure was.”

“Okay, so maybe bad luck follows me. We better see if the television weather channel can tell us anything about this storm, when it will clear out--what the next couple days look like.”

“Then if anyone still has an appetite we may as well get lunch out of the way.”

Trudy wasn't encouraged by the two day outlook. Living in a blizzard for two days wasn't her idea of fun, especially not since a murderer was sharing their lodgings. If it hadn't started as a rain and snow mix--all the ifs in the world won't change, won't solve this dilemma.

Alexandra and Trudy prepared the chicken soup and sandwiches they had planned for lunch without conversation.

Jamison and Max joined the guests at the table as did Trudy and Alexandra. Trudy had questions she wanted answered. She waited until the pleasantries and the-pass-this-pass-that lunch conversation turned to serious soup slurping. Marquis wasn't slurping his; that definitely was not his style.

"As owner and hostess of The Pink Lady Slipper, I would like to apologize for this bizarre turn of events. Though I can't control the weather, and that has caused us some major problems, it has made a mess of your visit with us. The death of your companion has shocked and saddened me. I have some questions I really and truly need answered if you wouldn't mind." She looked around the table--all eyes were on her, heads nodding, shoulders shrugging--it reminded her of a Sunday School class she had taught.

"Okay, who was the lady you were all traveling with?" More shrugs. "Are all you gentleman companions of Marquis?" More shrugs.

"Perhaps I should explain if I may," Marquis began.

"Please do," Trudy said feeling frustrated and apprehensive with the responses she had gotten so far.

"You see, I was traveling from my country and I arrived in the airport at--I believe you call it O'Hare--in your Chicago. This is so strange to have my luggage searched and I was in quite a state about it. This, woman who is now dead, came beside me and told them--the police security... whatever you name them, that I was indeed not carrying contraband or terrorist devices. They looked at her identification and let me pass quickly."

Trudy listened with rapt attention, but it still did not explain how they managed to wind up at The Slipper. "You never saw her before in your life?"

"Never. She was the very kindest person. She helped me. So when she asked if I could do a favor for her--call here make the reservations--and accompany her here, how could I refuse?"

"I can't believe you wouldn't have at least gotten her name," Alexandra said.

Trudy agreed but so many farfetched things had happened to her already that she was prepared to believe just about anything now a days. "Okay, so where did you pick up the silent shadows?" she said motioning to the other men who had not yet ventured to utter a word to her or anyone else.

"These, I gather, are some brotherhood. The woman also got them safe passage at a place in Chicago that we stopped. They cannot speak--she said their tongues have been removed."

Alexandra and Trudy looked at each other and then at the shadow men. *That would explain their silence. But why, who, would cut their tongues out and why?*

"I know you have questions about this. I am afraid I have never seen the tradition except in Sicily where it is a practice for those who would be in the service of the Master."

"And by the master I assume you mean, the Don, or the head of the Family?" Trudy couldn't believe that this barbaric tradition was still carried out. If it were true, it was also possible that one of those men were the one who killed her only female guest. She studied them closely--little men with beady black eyes. *Could they understand and write in English?* she wondered. She walked to her desk in the corner of the room and withdrew a slip of paper from one of the drawers. She wrote on it 'Do you understand English,' and returned and handed it to one of the men. He looked at the paper and handed it back to her. No sound came from his lips. She handed him the pen. He studied the pen, took the paper and wrote some words in a language she didn't understand. She took the paper and handed it to Alexandra.

"Greek to me," she said.

"Don't look at me," Jamison said. "I ain't never studied no foreign language. I have enough trouble with English."

Max just shook his head and put his hands up in a defensive motion--obviously he wouldn't know either.

Marquis took the paper and studied it briefly. "I believe it's Polish. I have seen that language a time or two. I cannot understand it, but I can recognize the form."

Wonderful, Trudy thought. They may or may not be mafia, they may or may not be Polish, they may be murderers who can't communicate with the rest of us--just knock us off one at a time.

Max and Jamison left to go tend to the chores in the barn and left Trudy to her own devices to figure out how they were going to get police help. Someone was a murderer, but who? She couldn't begin to imagine. *The idea of Marquis being a*

murderer was totally ridiculous. The other men were not actually connected to the woman and she did rescue them--they wouldn't kill her, would they? Her questions only gave her more questions, not answers. She hoped Xavier would try to reach her and, finding the phone not working, perhaps he would decide to come out and investigate. All she could do was hope and pray.

She got up from the table and began clearing away the lunch dishes, no further ahead than she was when the Amazon woman collapsed in the doorway. What did she see or hear before the woman was stabbed? She wracked her brain trying to hear, see, smell and feel the atmosphere before she saw the murdered woman collapse.

TUNG UMOLOMO, A Shutting of the Mouth

by Billie A Williams

ISBN 1-4137-0092-6

Blurb: *“If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor.”* Desmond TuTu

David Hemingway was not neutral, but he wasn't expecting what he found in Ewando, South Africa, hope and evil have no boundaries. Join Hemingway in Billie A Williams African Adventure story **Tung Umolomo**. Organized crime and tradition swirl around his plans for a change from ex-FBI to teacher of young minds, a life of harmony and freedom from violence.

“In a country well governed poverty is something to be ashamed of. In a country ill governed, wealth is something to be ashamed of.” Confucius says and Hemingway finds its absolute truth in the tiny Xhosa village of Ewando.

Tung Umolomo is an action adventure set in South Africa with the twists found in a good mystery. The South African heat cooks more than the landscape as ex-FBI agent David Hemingway and Peace Corps Doctor Alcina Danvers struggle against ignorance, superstition and political corruption to stop Russian Mafia leader Ivan Vyachenkov from robbing the Xhosa people of their pride, their land and their natural resources. Local legends, especially the tribal icon of good represented by the ever present Eagle Owl, play heavily in the lives of all the participants.

A car with his family in it isn't all that exploded and changed the life of David Hemingway when he decided to opt out of his FBI life and teach the children in the deepest darkest farthest away country he could think of Ewando South Africa. Only to find out that the only thing that really changed was the players and the playing field everything else remained the same.

Join them. Expect the unexpected, suspense with sass, mystery and suspense with edge of your seat action, and intrigue.

Tung Umolomo

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find out that the only thing that really changed was the players and the playing field everything else remained the same.

The Following titles are in the coming soon category:

Small Town Secrets
will be released January 2008

The Power Stones of the Goddess Ebony
has no release date though it has an approximate - watch for it
Jan, Feb, or March of 2008

Lavender Lust,
by Cricket Sawyer (friend and cohort) is an adult title
to be released in Jan, Feb, or March of 2008

Write to Entice, Spice up Your Writing
By Billie A Williams
A how to book on writing to make your writing stand out in the
crowd. Also, will be a workshop to be presented by Firedrake
Weyr Publishing LLC in August 2007.

Small Town Secrets (Coming January 2008) Unedited unproofed, excerpt:

Fires rage across the tiny town of Nettlesville . Someone is bent on burning it down to the ground one building at a time. Can Chaneeta and Olga bury their rivalry long enough to stop the arsonist before the town is nothing but ashes, or will Chaneeta's secret past destroy her?

CHAPTER ONE

Chaneeta Morgan heaved the big cardboard box from the storage area. A sigh squeezed from her because she compressed her ample size into a squashed, squatted position. The silence in the Golden Kettle Café was almost eerie it was so absolute. Some days she felt like the Café owned her rather than the other way around. No coffee pot perking, no stoneware dishes clanking against fork, knife or spoon, no muffled chatter, only silence. She pulled the first of the St. Patrick's Day garlands from the box. Green saran fringe sparkled like spring growth as she tacked it around the front window, removing the valentine red heart garland as she went. She loved the shamrocks hanging between the fringe and the pot of gold interspersed, centered in the design. The yearnings these decorations inspired. Her biggest wish this season was that the rash of fires that had begun in December would be over. It was as though the arsonist was invisible. Perhaps spring would bring a closure to whatever it was that had sparked his or her evil mission.

As though on cue, distant sirens shrieked into the quiet of the café interrupting her pondering and catching her attention before the police scanner sitting near the register crackled as a preannouncement that someone would be sending a message. She strained to hear the message, "Fire at 432 Iverson," the voice breaking over the scanners crackle said. Her heart seemed to get caught in her throat that was Bill Barker's residence. Chaneeta dropped the decorations, grabbed her keys and coat and headed for the fire station for her gear. It was hardly worth backing the car out of the garage since the fire station was only three blocks away, but she could save time by driving. It was times like these that being sixty some pounds over weight and fifty-three years old posed a problem. One without the other might not matter, but the extra baggage definitely slowed her down. Being a volunteer on the fire department was not something she took lightly nor was she ready to give up anytime soon. Town Chairperson or not, she felt the need to serve, to protect in whatever manner she could.

The third fire in as many weeks. She dreaded to think what they would find. Would this one be arson also? Why hadn't they been able to stop this guy—or—woman? Crime didn't seem to know gender or bounds any more. Everyone was fair game. Town's people were frightened and she felt powerless. Nettlesville population two hundred fifty, give or take a few was supposed to be the rural Wisconsin version of The Little House on the Prairie—not West Side Story wild and unruly.

She slipped into her gear and followed Jimmy and Howard Johnson to the medi-van as the pumper truck exited the building. The van followed and waited for Bob Clemone to close the doors and hop in the van.

“You have to do something about these fires Chaneeta,” Howard said anger creasing his face and drawing his bushy black eye brows together in a line meeting above his nose.

Chaneeta fiddled with the Velcro closure on her slicker. “Howie, you think I don't want this perp as bad as the rest of you? I've been hounding the Marinette County cops to intensify their investigation. They keep saying they're understaffed, over worked and doing the best that they can.” Sweat was starting to bead at the nap of her neck and trickle down her spine in the claustrophobic quarters of the van. Heat radiated across and down her back like someone had turned on a heater in her spine. *Not a hot flash, not now*, she grumbled inwardly. Actually, who would know with the rubberized slickers making everyone miserable, they all were soaked with sweat beneath them by the time the fire was over.

The scene at the Barker place lit up the night sky as brilliant orange and yellow flames reached skyward. Sparks danced like the Fourth of July as pieces of wood fell, or windows shattered with the heat of the blaze. The building was totally engulfed. Chaneeta's heart felt choked, as though the acrid smoke that filled her nostrils had tendrils that reached down to her heart and squeezed. “The children, the Barker's?” she questioned without wanting to ask the real question that tugged at her knotted stomach. “Did everyone get out safely?” she said scanning the area, looking for Bill, his wife Chen Lei or the four children. She knew there would be no hope of rescuing anyone from that building now if they weren't already out. The men targeted the hose on the roof and the building collapsed in on itself as they did. Sparks flew in all directions sending the onlookers clamoring to remove themselves from danger as they scuttled back farther.

“Too, late to save anything,” Stewart Lewis, Fire Chief for Nettlesville’s all volunteer fire department said as she approached his side. “All we can do now is keep her contained.

“The Barkers?” Chaneeta questioned hoping they hadn’t been inside. She scoured the surroundings again searching hopefully for the faces of the four Barker children, Bill or Chen Lei.

“Neighbors said they’re gone up north to visit relatives in Wausau. They’re the ones who called it in. Seems Emma got up to go to the bathroom and saw the blaze from her kitchen window.”

“Thank God,” the words squeezed out of her like a prayer of thanksgiving.”

The Tewsdays twins, Twice and Taaktu, hurried across the street waving at Chaneeta from where they had parked their car.

“Dusty won’t believe another fire,” Taaktu’s said. Taaktu being the younger of the twins by half an hour she was actually born a day later than Twice. She was the impetuous one, always on the go with nervous energy as though trying to make up for lost time. Dusty Rhodes, the current Constable for Nettlesville, had appointed Taaktu his deputy before he left on a month long vacation. She took her job dead serious and Chaneeta was glad to have her in that position.

They stood watching the house collapse in on itself. No one spoke for a long time.

“How could it have gotten this bad before someone saw it?” Twice said and then raised her hands surrender style as she wrapped her bathrobe tighter against the chill of the early spring night air. She looked at Chaneeta fully dressed, “Were you still up?”

“I was working on the St. Patrick’s Day decorations at the café.”

“Why didn’t you wait for morning? We’d gladly do that for you,” Taaktu said.

“Yeah! You shouldn’t be doing that. Your hired help should be,” Twice chimed in.

“I enjoy doing it. Besides, I couldn’t sleep. These fires are driving me to distraction.”

Chief Lewis nodded. “You aren’t the only one. You would think the guy would slip up somewhere. Maybe we need a more sophisticated investigator to try to figure this out before some one gets killed.”

Chaneeta didn’t get a chance to answer before shouts from the approaching Olga Corn, editor in chief of The Daily Nettle let her vehemence be heard. *No wonder the*

town's people dubbed The Daily Nettle the Stinging Nettle, Chaneeta thought. Her usual diatribe was to cut people to ribbons, and spit them out like chewing tobacco. She was marching across the boulevard like a mean mama in combat boots dragging her poor little reporter, photographer Bobbie Bjork with her. "What do you have to say for yourself now, Chaneeta Morgan, Town Chair Woman? How long do you expect the town to put up with your incompetence?"

For two cents Chaneeta thought she would deck the woman and worry about the consequences later, against her better judgment of course. Chief Lewis stepped between them. "Wait just a minute Ms Corn, it sure ain't Miss Morgan's fault that the Barker place caught fire. We don't know what caused it yet. So you hold your accusations for a bit until the Fire Marshal gets here and investigates it."

"Don't need no Fire Marshal to tell me this is like the other three – Don't need no Fire Marshal to tell me that Chaneeta Morgan is no more a town chairwoman than I am the Princess Diana."

Chaneeta stood her ground and glared at the fire and brimstone broiling from the angry Olga Corn. "I'm doing what I can Olga. The Marinette County Police Department, the State Fire Marshall they are all investigating. They have not found one single clue to use to pin this on anyone."

"And you let that useless Town Constable, Dusty Rhodes, take a month long vacation in the middle of this," she said pointing an accusing finger in Chaneeta's face.

"He had a vacation coming. He had made plans and I saw no reason to detain him. He had done his preliminary investigation."

Taaktu stepped in, "I'm in charge now. If you have a gripe talk to the hand," she said raising her hand between Chaneeta and Olga.

"Humph! We'll see about this." Olga turned on her heel and stomped over to direct her anger at her photographer to snap the pictures she wanted.

Chaneeta knew she had to do something to try to calm Olga down. There had to be some way to reach her and get her to work with her instead of against her, but what?

Chief Lewis shook his head and made a sign that he suspected Olga was crazy. The Tewsdays caught it and laughed uproariously, Chaneeta didn't join in she was too busy trying to figure out why, who, what was the purpose of these fires and why did Olga

blame her? She needed to have a serious talk with Olga Corn, but that would have to wait until another day. She walked to the perimeter of the fire and noticed words in spray paint on the small lawn and garden shed that sat towards the back of the property where Bobbie Bjork was working feverishly, snapping pictures. She motioned to Taaktu and Chief Lewis, and pointed where Bobbie Bjork was grabbing shots of the words with her camera.

“Don’t print that,” Taaktu said grabbing the camera away from Bobbie. “That will do exactly what the sick mind that set this fire wants it to do.” Bobbie stepped back afraid to try to fight for the camera.

Olga didn’t have that demeanor. She reached to grab the camera back from Taaktu. “You hand that over! It’s my property,” she growled glaring at Taaktu.

“Sure,” Taaktu opened the camera and pulled out the role of film, glad it wasn’t a digital camera yet. She pulled the film in a long dark string from its case – the blazing inferno beside them flickered bright candle-like teardrops of light dancing across the surface of the exposed red-brown film as it unraveled exposing the entire roll.

Olga turned to Chaneeta. “You will pay for this. You will. Mark my words.”

Chaneeta threw her hands up in the air. “Officer Tewsdays calls the shots in this investigation. I have no control over that. It seems to me she did the right thing if this could spark trouble in the community. Neighbor against Neighbor. We don’t need that. We have enough trouble. I think it’s time we work together don’t you?” she turned the challenge back around to Olga. Olga went quiet. She took the camera and handed it back to Bobbie. “We’ll do this one without pictures,” she said. “The whole town is here anyway. There is nothing we need to add to this.” She waved her arm across the inferno the burning house had become and the graffiti spray painted on the side of the tiny building.

“Chief have one of your men get a picture of that and then cover it please,” Taaktu cupped the film she had torn from Bobbie’s camera and then stuffed it in her jacket pocket.

The racial slur on the garden shed dug deep into Chaneeta’s insides. The slur stung deeper than she dared let anyone know. It was years since she let herself feel the anguish and the guilt of those kind of thoughts; thoughts that could cut a heart to shreds in

seconds screamed out of anger. Her father's voice, her mother's tears hovered over her like a storm cloud. Twenty years of burying those thoughts to be exact. She reached down and picked up the small doll. Half of it was black, charred from the fire, the other half stark white –it seemed metaphorical. Chaneeta's heart beat irregular, stilted. She wondered if anyone could tell her daughter was a racial mix. What did she look like twenty years later? Where was she? A tear slid down Chaneeta's cheek. She turned away from the small group, dashing a tissue from her pocket to her eye to catch the tattle tale tear. She caught Twice looking at her out of the corner of her eye. A quizzical expression crossed her face creating little wrinkles at the sides of her eyes. She reached out and touched Chaneeta's shoulder.

“It, its okay, it must have been an ash in my eye,” she said swiping the tears away.

Twice slid her arm around her shoulders anyway and pulled her into her side. “I know. This is awful, just plain awful. What will Bill and Chen Lei do now?” Obviously Twice wasn't accepting her explanation of the tears, but at least she conjured up meaning of her own that Chaneeta could live with.

Ten minutes before the fire she had been content, busy with decorating her life and the café. The glitter of the saran fringe, the promise of the pot of gold all lightened her existence and gave her hope for the future. Nettlesville is a good town, a safe place for families to grow and for people to retire. Chaneeta needed to see to it that it stayed that way. But suddenly all this peace and serenity exploded in her complacent face.

How could she ever think she could bring peace and justice to a town when she is as evil, as crooked, as the person who is preying on her constituents? She is criminal. She is part of a wrong as great as this. She hurt innocent people once by her actions she caused pain and suffering. For all she knew, the repercussions may still be reverberating where she left them. What about her little girl? She abandoned her to deal with racial injustice alone. Was she any better than the perpetrator setting these fires? The questions growled and clawed at her insides, suddenly she was in more pain than she had ever been in her life. She clutched her stomach and started to return to her car.

Taaktu walked over to the crowd and asked them to return to their homes. “The fire is all over. There is nothing left to see or do,” she said ushering the few towns people to their cars or to the sidewalk to walk back home.

The fire fighters piled into their various vehicles; leaving a couple of the more senior fighters to watch and stir the coals to be sure the fire didn’t burn outside the bounds they had set for it.

“What are we going to do about his?” Chaneeta said pouring them a cup of tea.

“Tonight, I suggest sleep,” Twice said always the practical one, Chaneeta mused. The town was looking to her for protection and it seemed whoever was doing this was out to prove just how ineffectual she was—but whom? Why?

“I think your right, but I doubt that I’ll be able to sleep,” Chaneeta said.

“It’s my job to figure this out. If it was arson, and we won’t know that for a couple days,” Taaktu stirred sugar into her tea.

“What do you suppose that graffiti tells us Taaktu? It’s absolute proof in my mind that the arsonist was at it again,” Twice stirred sugar and cream into her tea. “The other fires didn’t seem to be racially motivated,” she placed her spoon in the saucer and took a sip of the tea.

“Wait, the Vicksburg’s daughter—her children—I mean – they are mixed race, aren’t they?” Taaktu asked.

“That’s right. They are as dark skinned as the Jamaican Holly was mixed up with, but that’s over with,” Chaneeta said. “I will not tolerate racial discrimination in this community.” Her mind sorted through all those that she was aware of that had made slurs about the make up of the community being soiled by the invasion of immigrants. She shook her head.

“Yeah, well the other two could have been accidental,” Taaktu stood and placed her tea cup in the sink. “Sorry, I can’t think anymore tonight—or—this morning, I should say. I need to get a couple hours sleep anyway.” She gave Chaneeta a hug. “You coming Twice? Get some rest,” she told Chaneeta.

“We’ll do those decorations in the morning,” Twice hugged Chaneeta and followed Taaktu out the door.

“Taaktu are you going to try to reach the Barkers?” Chaneeta asked.

“First thing in the morning. No point in waking them this early certainly isn’t anything they can do now.” She waved at Chaneeta as she crawled into the drivers seat and started the small Ford Ranger truck. Twice bundled her robe around her and struggled her pudgy way into the passenger seat.

They may be twins, but they are as different as night and day, Chaneeta mused watching from the doorway as they drove away.

She caught a glimpse of a dark figure crouched beside her picket fence. As the car headlights faded down the street, the figure sprinted from behind the bushes and dashed toward her open door. She quickly slid inside, slammed the door and twisted the deadbolt lock. Her breath trapped in her lungs expanded her chest until she felt as though her lungs would burst. Quietly she pushed a corner of the drapes aside and saw the figure racing down the alley, limping heavily on his right leg. Her heart pounded against her rib cage, her lungs forced out the breath she had been holding in a huge sigh of relief. The arsonist perhaps? She made note of the person’s size, clothing, and limp in his or her right leg. He or she wasn’t fast, not young, she determined. The figure moved disjointed, cumbersome, not young and probably not athletic, but did she know who he, she hesitated, or she was. When you study people daily as they visit your establishment, not deliberately, but you begin to put the person into a picture of clothes, movements, attitudes...but this one remained a puzzle to her. The clothes did not give away gender; the hat covered the person’s hair. She watched until the figure disappeared. She would tell Taaktu in the morning. Chaneeta thought she would walk the fence line as soon as daylight came. Taaktu could investigate if there were any traces of the person left behind.

Today was long enough. She turned off the lights and headed to the bedroom, maybe sleep and her subconscious could stir up some answers for her.

The Power Stones of the Goddess Ebony began as one of those writing prompts that were nothing more than some unrelated words that begged to be written about. See if you can determine what those words might have been.

The Power Stones are actually dressed up to look like beads in an antique necklace. The covering of the beads is beginning to wear off. The covering is a jeweler's paste made of vulture egg shells and other ingredients. As the covering wears off the beads/stones become more powerful. The goddess Ebony has put a curse on them. If they aren't returned to her before the paste wears off she will destroy the earth. The goddess is in South Africa and a Shaman who has been made responsible for their return has been tracking them for years. Follow the accidental sleuth's as they tread on foreign soil and foreign cultures trying to solve the mystery of these Power Stones.

THE POWER STONES OF THE GODDESS EBONY

by Billie A Williams

ONE [Prologue]

It looked like she had been sitting on the park bench we had bought for her birthday last summer. Perhaps the papers were on her lap. She must have stood up and let them fall. She left them lay like wasted time, just there. No breeze to stir them, march them away, dance them off to some happier place. Three steps maybe four was all she took. She lay there like those papers, just there. No breeze to stir her, or wind to pick her up and dance her to heaven's door. No. The sheets of paper, the years of her life lie on the ground and speak no words for us to hear on rustled breeze. We wept standing there connected by heart strings, pearls from her womb tarnished a bit by life, but never tarnished in her eyes. We were like bleached out paper lying in the sun on the ground. We made no sound, nor did she or they, those papers of no importance.

Daringer J Daringer fell to his knees beside her, hoping against all hope that he had somehow fallen asleep and this was all a bad dream, a lie that never could have happened. *Why do we think that by not believing something it will automatically make it false*, he thought. A heavy weight inside his chest crushed his heart and soul, it couldn't be. He felt a breath then, so shallow, but breath, none-the-less. "Quickly," he said to his sisters, "call an ambulance she is still alive."

The ambulance arrived lights flashing siren blaring, hurried movements that shoved him back away. "Precious mother, live," he prayed aloud. Oxygen mask obscured her never faltering smile. Her hair floated in gray wisps, a halo to her near white, ashen face. "Live mother," he said as they shut her in the orange and white van that smelled of disinfectant. *Had the last patient they transported died*, he wondered at the smell.

Isana jumped aboard the van. Always the first to do the action that must be done, oldest sister style, "I'll call you later unless you drive over," she said.

"I'll be there," Trudchen younger sister said.

"I'm on my way soon." Daringer Daringer heard his, middle child self murmur. Shock froze his leaden legs where they stood. *Mothers don't die, not Story Lady Mothers* as though the thought would make it so.

"I'm driving over to the hospital; do you want to ride along?" Trudchen said somewhere outside his fog. He nodded then, but couldn't move. She took his arm and led him to her car.

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"The cold, bright corridors of the hospital where shoes squeaked on the too polished, disinfected floors and made you wince, shhhhh the silence hissed like a librarian in his mind.

"Coma," the doctor said. The rest of his words mumbled and obscured by grief Daringer felt he need not have just yet. "She lives," he heard those words both loud and clear and shook his head out of that dense and horrid fog of death and despair.

“Can we see her now?” Daringer asked. They turned to stare as if he hadn’t been there until now. As though the words had made him visible where before he was an empty space.

“Of course, it would probably be good for you all. We will run tests but, I can’t give you any idea of what happened to her at this point.”

“She is stabilized though, you said?” Isana asked.

“Yes, for now. We have her on oxygen and an IV will keep her comfortable.”

“I read somewhere that people in a coma can hear and it is the voices that eventually bring them back.” Trudchen said.

“It can’t hurt, but I don’t know if there is any fact to that tale or not.” The doctor said as he led the way to her room. “Leave a number where we can reach one of you with the nurse at the nurse’s station before you leave,” he said.

We nodded. Joined at the womb we thought each others thoughts, triplets as we were. We shared more than just space we discovered early on. Daringer was the middle child in terms of birth order. Five minutes separated us, he thought. Isana always first and petite little Trudchen always followed our lead.

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He was staying at his mother’s while he visited. They dropped him off on their way home. “A long day, shower, rest,” they said. “We’ll call you in the morning,” he seemed to remember they said.

His mother had asked him to come and see the beads in the unusual necklace she had acquired. She wanted him to try to tell her where they came from. We never got to them. Where would she have them hidden? She said she would hide them because of their power. Daringer searched her jewelry box, unable to sleep. He searched her room and found the travel diaries lined up neatly according to the years on her shelf above her computer, *my modern story lady mother*, he thought.

Daringer wondered when he found them tucked in her lingerie drawer, what the significance – what were the beads that worried her so? The gold gilded box with a reclining angel on top, held the beads. The beads seemed ordinary, if not a bit garish in their setting. Something about them as he touched them though, struck him with unanticipated grief. When he lifted the black stone, it was as though some invisible electric impulse traveled from his fingers up his arm and to his heart. His heart ached with sorrow. Year’s worth of sadness flooded over him, washing him in blackest despair creating nearly unbearable heart wrenching sorrow. He dropped the black stone he held, back in the red velvet lined coffin it had come from as though it burned his fingers instead of his heart.

Dare he touch another –White—white is peace, purity-- safe. Warily he picked up the white stone between thumb and forefinger ready to release it if he felt any ominous presence there. As he lifted it ever so cautiously, an anguished cry accompanied by a rush of wind sent icy howls around the room. He quickly dropped the stone. If even white was not purity, was not peace, what then of the other stones. Neither the blue, the green, the yellow stones—the rest he dared not touch, nor the purple for surely something is in those stones, some spell some mystic presence. His hands trembled as he replaced the lid on the box. Perhaps another time, a braver soul could test each bead against the day. Not him, not this time, not now.

“What is in your heart emanates from each stone. Only the purest heart can hold these stones.” The sound echoed from some where not audible, and registered only in his mind it seemed. He didn’t hear a sound in his ears of that he was very sure. With that the small box whisked out of his hand and deposited itself back in the lingerie drawer under layers of her personal silk under garments. Daringer stood long, looking at what had happened and wondering if he had imagined it. Perhaps the grief he held, the fear for his mother’s life clouded what he thought he saw, what he thought he heard, did it occur?

Where would she have ever come up with such trinkets? Her trips took her to worlds she knew intimately and we never knew at all. We were too busy to be interested in what we called her eccentricities. Her travel journals on the book shelf beckoned him; at least he thought they did. What magic force did she encounter to come away with these stones? He toyed with the idea of removing the box and putting it in his pocket to ponder their significance later. *Do I dare leave them behind and never know what became of them?*

Guardedly, he slipped his hand back into the drawer, withdrew the box, and tucked it into his pocket. He felt warmth where it touched against him. He noticed no sound, no further wind with garish cries to chill his soul or slights of hand depositing the box where it chose – merely warmth, penetrating warmth, radiating into his skin. He felt it safe to take the necklace with him then. He gathered the travel journals in his arms. *Perhaps they recorded the source of these stones,* he thought.

He dared to glance one final look around the room. It’s emptiness without her presence was more than he could bear. He wanted to run away, to be gone from here and not look back. If she was to be buried; there was little else he wanted of her left behind life. Let the rest of them deal with her possessions, he had the memories and that was enough for now. The box moved slightly in his pocket. he patted it “and you of course,” he murmured to the emptiness.

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In the days that followed the house was flooded with well-wishers, condolence-spouters – as though there were already a wake. Never noticed her before, they do now. Daringer could not sit through a torturous semi- or pre- wake. She isn’t dead yet, he wanted to shout, but held his tongue.

Instead, he walked until he couldn’t walk any more and found myself at the outdoor market. He watched the colorful streams of marketers. He walked hopelessly in the crowded outdoor market. The serapes and parasols bumped and prodded him. The sights and sounds blurred past him. The haggling drone of the venders soothed his grief more than all the well-wishers with their pasty gray faces, false sad furrowed brows and crocodile tears.

People squeezed, smelled, pinched, and prodded the colorful array of fresh produce. They held the bright fruit up to the sun as though they offered it in prayer to Rah or the deity of fruit, before they dropped it into bags, boxes, and sacks or snuck them into pockets while they thought no one watched. The market was alive and vibrant with everydayness. A wake was not awake, why call it that? It was dead and still, silent and sad, painful and pointless. Even the spirits of the dead do not visit at the wake. There is too much sadness for them to bear. So why should we. Listen to people’s lies, “she looks so peaceful lying there,” they say. I want to shout, “Did you ever see her sleep?”

Isana and Trudchen already preparing her wake—when she lingers still this side of heavens gate.

“Prepare for the inevitable,” Isana said. Always so practical and organized with her hand out for whatever she could grab and pocket.

“Isn’t it enough,” he said. “This steady stream of condolences and well wishers hovering at the door like vultures waiting for scraps of her life to be tossed to them to savor after her death? What if she lives?” He wanted to shout, to no one in particular, but to shut out the sound of Isana’s drone about what we must do when.

“Out damn spot,” so like Macbeth I wanted to purge that woman from my life that shared one third of our mother. She didn’t deserve her share, she was like the blood red stain that wouldn’t wipe clean.

“She looks good. Her hair is very nicely done,” they say. He want to shout, “Did you know the skin melts when a curling iron touches the scalp of a dead person?” I drew my attention back to the joyous hubbub of the market square.

Green, yellow, and every shade in between bananas hung in huge clumps hacked from the trees that very morning. “Too much,” one yelled over the din of bartering hordes. *Not to a starving child I thought.* They’d gladly pay any price, if they only had it, for the spoils that littered the ground and beckoned the insects and rodents and robber birds. Children starve not allowed to enter the market square. They wouldn’t let the children in to clean up the dropped fruit. The starving hordes of brown little faces with eyes as big as moons and arms as gaunt as scarecrows standing at the periphery of all that luscious fruit rotting in the sun.. Weren’t they as good as the insects, rodents and birds? They lined the streets outside the market begging like so many little brown beads strung on a string of starvation within inches of salvation. No one noticed or so it seemed. He’s sure God must have, was He waiting for a tender heart to care, to step in and save these street urchins? He cared and did. One large bunch of bananas found its way to excited outstretched hands.

Why do we not see, feel or hear until it’s too late like the string of beads, the sheaf of papers that was, life stops. Littering the ground and hiding in drawers, rotting in the sun all the sum total of a life lived while no one noticed, Daringer thought feeling despondent, growing weary with even the noisy bright marketplace..

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There were things he could do while he waited for word that his mother crossed one way to life or the other way to eternal life. He could do some of the repair and maintenance that needed doing around her home. Before the old place could be sold, it would need to be restored, not for a better market price but for them, the spirits. If the souls or spirits stay behind to wait, they need a good place to do that, he reasoned. Daringer wanted to repair the railing on the seldom used back stairway. He could incorporate the box with the necklace of strange stones; He could hide it below the spindles. Why he had the urge to bury them where they couldn’t be found again he didn’t know. It was there though, the urge strong and insistent. These beads seemed to possess a power he wasn’t sure he was man enough to tamper with.

When he began to remove the damaged stair railing to replace it, the stringers toppled like dominos clanking heavily to the bare wood floor. They looked like so many dead soldiers lying exposed after the war. Bodies helter-skelter having fallen where they

stood—shattered lives, beads in a box, beads on a rosary, dots on the planet earth. What was their reason for being? Where did they go and why? Who traversed these steps? How many hands held this railing? Were some of them those dead soldiers, and what war were they – Civil, WWI or WWII? Or were they none of these? Perhaps deserters, perhaps charlatans, and rogues who hid beneath the cellar and let their wives be liars instead while they fathered children who would have been better off dead than become fodder for another war. A time when their bodies boxed returned fallen heroes from another time. Where did these thoughts originate? Why are they my concern? His mind whirled with confusion. Daringer began to wonder about his sanity and if the stones were powerful enough to cause him to become delusional. He shuddered and pulled himself back to what he was doing.

He couldn't plant the necklace beneath the stringers on that stair knowing what he knew. That thought too was foreign. What was it he supposed he knew? He did not know. Daringer kept them in his pocket, and the heat along his thigh grew. It seemed they were content to know that he would keep them longer.

Daringer mended the broken railing. Would that it were so easy to mend my grieving heart. *She isn't gone yet.* The phrase cried in his mind and he prayed again for life.

“When will you give me grandchildren my son,” she asked.

He was too busy with his career to be tied down yet. He had said, “Soon mother soon.” There is plenty of time Mom,” he said. Oh is there? Now he wondered at his flippant attitude.

~*~

On his way out of town back to the academic life he chose, because he couldn't stay and wait and wait. “Keep me posted,” he said. Trudchen and Isana said they would. He passed by the new massive shopping mall that would bring the sleepy little town out of its complacent pleasantness and into the new century. He wanted to shout, “Don't, Please don't you can never go back once you touch the future.”

Beams hung suspended high above the ground tethered to a crane with chains. Yellow and blue helmeted workers dangled feet from steel girder roosts where they sat jovial and animated with coffee and lunches. Steel men they call them, they mean their occupation, but it fits the men – nerves of steel and bodies of iron. These bronzed, sure footed mountain goats on narrow girder path ways sit and eat while steel I-beams sit and wait, while lunch and camaraderie are served—yellow, blue, white beads perched on steel girder threads.

~*~

Daringer approached the three lane bridge that spanned the river. It was as though the universe was suddenly exiting through a birth canal once large enough, but barely so, for but one child – not a universe.

A string of garnet jewels with cubic zirconium accents lined the bridge single file in triple rows. Angry red jewels flashed impatiently on and off from dim to bright as vehicle occupants depressed and released brake pedals.

Pouring rain splotted the windows creating mosaic stained glass patterns on the windshield and side windows. Entombed in metal caskets, waiting to snake through the

bottleneck the tall bridge created. Short bursts from impatient horns snarled at immobile red eyes ahead.

Trapped. The radio announced traffic conditions on the bridge as stand still, jammed. Find an alternate route. The anger Daringer felt leapt to the man that stepped out of his car and stood on the hood. “Oh no! He has a gun. He’s firing.” First at the traffic reporter’s helicopter. Now he sprayed the cars around him. Screams, zinging bullets –screaming, crack, crack, crack, the Uzi spends its power. Out of power, he pitches the weapon and jumps from vehicle to vehicle shouting angry curses. Before anyone can think to stop him he hurdles to the pavement and races across the bridge and down the road. Daringer sat mesmerized not believing what his eyes were telling him. Now strings of flashing red and blue lights squeezing through no-drive lanes, stretcher bearers-stringing life saving paramedics to the bead of lives that threaten to fade away. Blue uniforms race from car to car, the stranded traffic is destined to be a vault for hours while the massacre is cleaned up and dispensed with like so many colored beads on an ordinary necklace day.

Daringer rested his hand on his hip pocket with the box holding the necklace, the box trembled and the warmth turned hot. He got out of his car to go see if he could help in any way. I couldn’t bear to be confined with the box of beads, they frighten him and he had forgotten about them until this.

~*~

Daringer was a nervous glad to be boarded on a plane. He wondered if it would hold together as it started its jolting train like sway on the slow path down one runway, around a corner with a bounce, groan, creak, cough and down another.

It made him feel like they should all stick their feet down through the floor boards and push, like a top heavy blue footed booby it struggled to gain speed enough. He could see the grass growing in clumps in the cracks in the runway. He could smell the pungent aroma of new mowed hay. “Shut the window,” he wanted to shout. “Turn on the fan to help the propellers pull,” – something—anything to get us safely off the ground. Away from the dark, depression he felt here in this place that once held her jovial story telling heart.

The plane launched itself from the runway – wings rattling --- trembling against the torque –machine defying gravity. A mechanical bumble bee that maybe, just maybe, didn’t have the right DNA to fool Mother Nature and fly after all. The beads trembled in heated agitation in his pocket; He reached for them and held his breath as clouds strung like pearls on blue sky threads and the plane soared between them in its small single engine way. “It’s safe to miss her now,” the beads seem to say in his mind. A tear that waited so long faltered on his lower lid and then slipped down his cheek. Only one, but it’s enough this close she would understand. “I hope it’s not Good-bye” he whispered above the clouds in the setting sun. “But, what of the beads, what mystery unsolved, what message do they hold? Where will I find that answer?” and the beads glowed warm again inside his pocket to let him know they heard the questions or so he supposed they did.

Lavender Lust,

By Cricket Sawyer

Something a little bit edgy is a title I've given to another author Cricket Sawyer. This title is mildly erotic in nature with paranormal tendencies. So it pushes some boundaries – This first chapter is not adult in nature, but will give you an idea of what lies ahead. I began this book because of a woman I had dealings with who seemed to be a split personality. At once she was a clever and sharp business woman – and in the next breath she was a ruthless tyrant that would do whatever it took to get what she wanted. If you got on her bad list, she may not stop at using her voodoo doll to extract your punishment. She was a force to deal with in both her personalities. What a deliciously interesting juxtaposition of character traits for a Jekyll and Hyde type serial murderer.

What follows is Lavender Lust – with Elinor Muich our black and white “Lady” and her alter ego Lavender Paige the lethal ‘Black Widow spider’ type.

Lavender Lust

By Cricket Sawyer

Chapter One

Elinore Muich tugged at the dress so it rested just at the top of her long legged thighs. She looked in the mirror. Her legs were definitely her best feature. Too bad she could only wear black and white at work. Purity and evil—all and nothing—that’s what the colors meant to her, but she felt she commanded more attention in the male dominated advertising world with the stark contrast of colors in the black and white she chose to wear. But that was another place and time as Lavender Paige knew, purple was everything else.

Privately, the color purple was her favorite color, and it went so well with her skin tone. The color also accentuated her ivory complexion. She put in near violet colored contact lenses, admiring her reflection. *Purple definitely is my color*, she thought. She slipped the heavy, grey wool coat off its hanger and out of the closet. Placing a wide brimmed hat over the wig, she slid her feet into the tall boots. She dropped the purple stiletto heeled boots into her carry bag. The hat was large enough to conceal her features as again she checked her appearance in the full-length mirror, tucking the blonde wig under the hat. Dark glasses further disguised her. As she turned off the light, she checked to be sure she hadn’t left anything in disarray. ‘A place for everything and everything in its place.’ Her maiden aunt had badgered her relentlessly with that phrase. She left the suite satisfied her aunt would be proud.

She chuckled. “Oh the games we play,” she said once she was alone in the elevator.

The old brown Pontiac groaned as it started. It had been a week since she had taken the car anywhere. Reliable, she thought. She liked reliable, not like most men. Most men think with their anatomy. She had her own way of getting even for their vulgarity. She flicked the black widow spider hanging from her rearview mirror. She loved to watch the black crystals as they caught the light and reflected it in splotches all over the beige interior of the sedan. She loved spiders, especially the black widow. What a talented and shrewd woman. She knew exactly how life should be lived. Lavender threw her head back and laughed. “Yes, the black widow is a delightfully brilliant lady.”

The fluff of new snow blew off the car as she got up to speed on the freeway turning the car into a cloud of white as it kicked up the untraveled fluff of snow and shed its own cocoon of white. Not much traffic tonight. Just as well, she thought. Pickings would be better that way.

Lavender parked the car on the side street near Main. She slid off the grey coat and wide-brimmed hat, pulled on the short orchid fur jacket, the purple stiletto heels she retrieved from her bag and flounced her blonde wig. Checking her makeup in the mirror, she tucked her purse under the seat before she retrieved a small gold bag with the gold chain out of the glove compartment. She checked the rearview mirror, the street up and down, smiling at the lack of traffic. She slipped out of the car and locked the door.

As she stretched her long lanky legs into a hooker stride she rounded the corner of the main drag and saw the regulars were already at work. They nodded to her as she headed for her corner, at least the corner that had been hers since Delilah was arrested; the poor dear. I wonder who could have told the cops about the forged check she gave the agency that rented her the rooms? She chuckled under her breath. You have to get close to people in order to use their ignorance; some are so easy to use. The code of ethics between the ‘girls’ was strong and strictly respected. Violators were given one warning. Lavender had seen the results of someone infringing on another girl’s spot and it wasn’t pretty. It took Kat three weeks in the hospital to recuperate from her mistake and she never returned to Main Street. She had heard through the grapevine that she worked Z Street now.

A long silver Cadillac slowed as it drove by. The driver examined the merchandise like a boy inspecting goodies in a candy store. So much to choose from he couldn't seem to make up his lusty mind. The twins strutted out to the curb. He stopped; they leaned in to the car. Quickly backing away they returned to their spot shaking their heads 'no' to the group, meaning this was one nasty dude; no one should service him. Here was a nasty who needed a lesson. Lavender knew exactly who he was. Everyone got the message as the twins words of warning were passed down the street. No one would take his offer now, no one but Lavender that is....

The patrol officer rounded the block again. The silver Cadillac was still there, illegally parked. Maybe the rich figure they are immune to city regulations, but not on his beat. The car had been there the better part of his shift and it was time he took charge. He would ticket it and call the wrecker to tow it to impound. The officer pulled up behind the Caddy, gave dispatch his location and activity status before he walked to the car. It wouldn't do to be out of your car and alone in this neighborhood without alerting dispatch first. He wasn't prepared to see a body; a naked man, his face contorted like a fun house mask, lying on the front seat of the Cadillac. He hit the button of the radio on his shoulder. "We got us another stiff—dead male at 82 W First Avenue," he said in short, matter-of-fact sentences. "Better send homicide and forensics, as well as the coroner." He let go of the button. He didn't trust himself to describe the gruesome scene over the radio. To preserve his calm he began to make notes about the scene he had observed on arrival: things like license plate number, kind of car, weather conditions, place and time—anything that the chief might ask him later about the site. He didn't dare touch anything. He'd let the detectives handle that. He could tell from the condition of the body, the man was dead, no doubt about that in his mind. His stomach involuntarily began to roil and he moved away from the car to regain his composure.

Elinore picked up the newspaper. The headlines screamed across the top of the page. *The Purple Feather Murderer Strikes Again. Another murder downtown.*

Conjecture ran for several columns about possible cause, who it may have been, how, and why he was murdered. She put the newspaper in her briefcase and walked the two blocks from the bus stop to her office.

“Good morning Ms. Muich,” the doorman greeted her as she turned into the Wallington Plaza Suites office building. She tipped her wide-brimmed hat, smiled, and glided through the door into the lobby. The morning hubbub had already begun. She caught snatches of conversations, shock, and fear about the murder of a fellow co-worker. Left naked in his parked car. “How humiliating, his poor wife,” someone remarked.

Indeed, Elinore thought. His conduct, if his poor wife found out, would have been far more embarrassing. The lecherous, two timing dolt got what he deserved. She pushed the elevator button for the top floor where the executive suites were located. There would be recruitment letters to send out and interviews to schedule to fill the place he left vacant.

“Good morning Ms. Muich,” her receptionist said as she walked through the door.

“Have you heard the awful news about Mr. Carver?”

She nodded her head. Elinore strode into her office, Penny Drews hot on her heels, talking a hundred miles an hour about phone calls, appointments and meetings. Penny handed her the stack of messages and a steaming cup of coffee.

“Thank you Penny. Would you reschedule all my appointments today? With Mr. Carver’s death we will need to get some recruitment letters in the mail and post the job opening in the junior executive offices.” She shooed the girl back out the door, plopped her briefcase on her desk, and removed the newspaper and the files she had taken home to work on.

She sat down, picked up the coffee and swiveled to look out over the expanse of city below. Cross Point had grown by leaps and bounds as she had struggled up the steps to the top of Smith, Smith and Muich Enterprises. A hard fought battle that no two-bit male chauvinist would take away from her because she refused to play footsie with him. She spun back around to answer the intercom as Penny buzzed her.

“Heather Highmark to see you,” she announced.

“Send her in,” Elinore said. She put her cup down, smoothed her short, red hair and laced her long slender fingers together on the desk in front of her. As Penny led Heather Highmark in, Elinore motioned to the chair in front of her desk. “Please have a seat. Care for coffee, a soda, anything?”

Heather declined and Elinore dismissed Penny. Elinore knew Heather had been working with the police to help try to solve the series of strange murders. She wondered what, if anything, this girl knew. She hoped she had a way to find out.

“Here is the book you ordered,” Heather said, reaching across the desk to hand Elinore the first edition copy of *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*. Elinore had the second edition translated by Edward Fitzgerald; this would be a magnificent addition to her collection.

Elinore picked up the book as if it were fragile crystal. Fine literature and early editions of classic works lined her bookshelves, it was one of the few passions she allowed herself. “Oh, it’s exquisite,” she sighed. Placing the book in front of her, she slid her hand over the cover of the slender volume like a lover caressing her mate and carefully opened the cover. “What price were you finally able to get it for? Oh no, never mind, it really doesn’t matter. Penny will write you a check.” She held the book like an art lover might hold an original Van Gogh. “What does it matter? This treasure is mine...all mine.”

“I think we nearly stole it,” Heather said as she slid the bill across the desk to Elinore.

“Marvelous. You are a shrewd business woman,” Elinore said as she buzzed her receptionist. “Write the lady a check, will you dear.” She handed Penny the bill.

“Who shall I make the check to?” Penny asked.

“*The Wizard’s Bookstore* is fine,” Heather said. Penny left to prepare the check.

“I know you do tarot readings, but I’m wondering if you ever channel for the dead. Like say, I wanted you to try to reach Fitzgerald.. You know, to know what he was thinking when he translated this.” She watched Heather’s face carefully to see her reaction, trying to decipher her thinking process while she waited for her to answer.

“I have never tried to reach the long dead,” Heather said finally. “I’m not at all sure how to go about that. I don’t know even if I would be strong enough to do something like that. I do Tarot readings, but have never held a séance.”

Elinore smiled. So she hadn't tried to talk to the dead for the police. Unless she had seen—had a vision of a future assault on the dead men, she would not actually have asked the victims who murdered them. "I understand. I was just curious." Elinore breathed a sigh of relief as Penny returned with the check and handed it to Heather.

Heather stood up prepared to leave. "If you would like someone to do a séance for you, I can try to find you a medium," she said.

"No, actually, I find that rather distasteful. I mean the dead should remain so, and undisturbed, don't you think?"

Heather agreed and Elinore watched her weave her way towards the elevator. *What would Heather Highmark see if she had her do a reading for her?* Elinore thought. She may have to make an appointment to find out just what Heather could tell from a tarot reading, if anything.

The Non Fiction Titles
Writing Wide, Exercises in Creative Writing
Characters in Search of an Author
Write to Entice, Spice up Your Writing

You present a mediocre middle where you enlarged on the premise. We have Dick and Jane with a new family member all cooing and sweet. Playing patty cake with the new baby Sally and helping mommy with all the chores. Dick and Jane fully engage in the nicety of the day. Smiling all the while.

Meantime, between the lines, Bonnie and Clyde are terrorizing neighborhoods. They found, as a team, they could let modifiers dangle, split infinitives, and even toss in a fragment of a sentence to yell “danger,!” or obscenities at the perfect sentence.

Then comes the stark and perfect ending. Dick and Jane, Spot and Puff, Mommy and Daddy and baby Sally live happily ever after doing all the nice, perfect sentence, perfect grammar, perfect penmanship, staying between the lines living a family can do.

While between the lines, you do your Martin Short impression of “On the Wild Side.” You burst at the seams and scribble maniacally, obliterating the fine lines between good and evil, right and wrong. You dare to write an unhappy ending; you dare to challenge the authority that said that you had to stay between those lines. The grammar was true and good. The sentence structure is terse and bright. The story was aflame with passion for the written words. You wrote between your own lines, but in the bigger spaces where the real story lies.

Now, you use plain paper and perhaps a colored pen different for each day you write. Or you use a blank screen on your computer and have as much or as little white space on the page as you choose. You may draw to illustrate a point until you find the perfect words. You learned the rules so that you would know HOW to break them. No one would care, or even notice, because the story grabbed him or her, pulled the reader in and held them captive until the story said—“The End”. The phrase in your head echoes “Rules are made to be broken,” but you know from what you learned, it is good to know the rules and if you break them, break them with purpose, reason, and understanding.

EXERCISES: Try This

1. Rewrite a favorite fairy tale and be sure to change the ending. Find something that needs to be written between the lines as defined above.

“Did Red Riding Hood have an ulterior motive for walking through the woods when she knew it would be dangerous?” “Was Goldilocks deliberately mean to the three bears, messing up their house because it was too perfect...entering because the door wasn’t locked...not cleaning up the dishes she dirtied? What was her punishment?” “How about that Cinderella – or Rose Red, or Snow White – is the story like they told you – or is there more?”

2. Tell a story about a lie either you or someone else told. Tell it as if it was necessary. How much white space did you need to surround it with to make it believable?
3. If you write portions of your life to understand them, do you couch them in fallacy to make the reasons you did things more palatable to the reader. Or do you tell it like it is?
4. Pretend you are a writer in a different genre — A genre you don’t want anyone to know Billie Williams would never write in — but Janelle Wicked might — Maybe instead of a Billie mystery – Janelle writes a Romantic Suspense with some very wicked stuff in it – then it would be a Janelle Wicked story as she wrote between the lines of a cozy mystery dressed up in broken rules to tell the story more fully, more passionately, more like it really was— breaking all the rules of Happily Ever After and many more or finding them in a new venue.

Grammar and Genre Rules Note

“A memory of yesterday’s pleasures, a fear of tomorrow’s dangers, a straw under my knee, a noise to mine ear, alight in mine eye, an anything, a nothing, a fancy. A chimera in my brain, troubles me in my prayers. So certainly is there nothing, nothing to spiritual things, perfect in this world.”

John Donne, English Poet

Keep in mind always, that grammar rules have purpose and reason. Sentence fragments in fiction have a place even though the grammar books hate them. Other rules should not be broken. You need to know them in order to choose which can be bent or broken.

Just as there are rules for grammar, there are rules for each genre. Certain expectations of the readers of those genres apply and you must know. You may also break those rules, but be aware that the fan of cozy mysteries might not appreciate a crossing of the genre rules. That is why, in part, that small publishers have become so popular, they are willing to consider cross genres. If you want to combine a sensual romance with a cozy mystery – they may like it and so form a new category. If it sells well, they will be delighted to accept more of the same. Tread lightly though, as always, know the rules and know how and why before you attempt to break them.

Characters in Search of an Author

ISBN 1-932794-15-8

By Billie A Williams

I've included the table of contents to help you get a feel for this book. It contains many forms and character sheets to help you explore the different methods so that you may put together one that works for you.

I hope you find it helpful

Creating Characters That Live and Breathe and Your Readers Love

“We cannot judge either of the feelings or of the character of men with perfect accuracy, from their actions or their appearance in public; it is from their careless conversation, their half-finished sentences, that we may hope with the greatest probability of success to discover their real character.”

Maria Edgeworth

Personaggi in Cerca d'autore
CHARACTERS IN SEARCH OF AN AUTHOR

Billie A Williams

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Part I

Introduction

“Our deeds determine us, as much as we determine our deeds; and until we know what has been or will be the peculiar combination of outward with inward facts, which constitute a man’s critical actions, it will be better not to think ourselves wise about his character.”

George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans)

Why should I waste my time with all these character building forms, exercises and readings? Why can't I just dive in and write my story using whatever people I choose naming them as I go along. You can, but the list of reasons why you shouldn't is almost as long as the table of methods, ways and means for building a character profile.

The short answer is *consistency, believability, reliability*, and keeping details straight not to mention the extra weight the right name for your character can add to the meaning of your story. Let's look at each of these reasons more closely.

Consistency: The uniqueness of this character, her personality or type, her physical description, where she lives, where she works, who are her friends and family right down to the kind of car she drives or doesn't drive and the reasons she doesn't. Without a profile, without some of the other devices for keeping your character notes straight, you may trip yourself up. Many a time I have been writing up a storm only to trip over questions like —What color were her eyes...How can she flip her pony tail if on page ten I gave her a short spiked hair do? A quick check of the character charts profile gave me my answer easily, sure enough, saved myself from having to re-read to find the character trait that could have messed up my chances for publication because of inconsistencies. There are other ways of a story being inconsistent but that of character is the most glaring.

Believability: Would this character say, do, react or behave in this manner as s/he's been developed so far? If you've done the profile, using zodiac signs and other character trait devices that you can see at a glance you are less likely to have your person do something that would be totally out of character for him or her.

Reliability: Again, you as an author can't force a character who is terrified of snakes into a room full of snakes to pick up a quarter someone dropped in that room. That is an extremely ridiculous example, but you get the drift. Your characters are not checkers or chess pieces, you have breathed life into them – they are real. They will only behave in a certain way given the personality you have developed for them – or at least, should have developed for them. By developing fully, well-rounded characters you give your reader a reason to love, hate, empathize with him or her. Minimally, you should create some emotional reaction between character and reader. A reader will snap a book shut which has no emotional bond or connection to pull her into the story. Think of your character building as CPR for your character's life.

Keeping the details straight when you have two or more characters in your novel, with similar goals, or even opposite goals can be a challenge. Charting background information on them i.e., from the towns they live in complete with streets, stores, restaurants, places they frequent, or even go to once or twice during the course of the novel—your details need to be consistent throughout the story. Your time line of story history can easily become polluted by the time you trek across two hundred pages or more. You can take the hassle out of keeping these things straight if you jot them down as you go. You need to know who was privy to what information or you could easily have your sleuth solve a crime with clues he never had—your reader's will remember that faux pas. Keep tabs on those things as they appear by penciling them in on your original profile sheet – in different colored inks – one for character, one for place names, one for time-line or other information, helps in finding what you seek. I usually print out a character sheet for each significant character in my novel and put them in a protective sleeve so I can keep them near while I'm writing without chance they will become tattered. Any new information is jotted in as I go, keeping it handy if I need it again saves a bunch of back tracking. Slight of hand doesn't work with your reader. The old formula – “if you bring a gun out in chapter one – it better have shot someone before the end of the story,” or your reader will lose faith in you. The same is true of the opposite. If the clue never showed up, then it can't be used to solve the crime or conclude the book no matter what genre it is. Readers like surprises, twists in your story but not things appearing out of the blue to answer the story question at the very end.

If your character has green eyes in scene one, she better not have brown, or blue, or hazel anywhere else in the book unless it's deliberately done with colored contact lenses as a planned disguise.

If your character hoists a magnum to shoot someone, she better know how to use it and have both the physical and the emotional strength, to use it. Deliberately shooting someone takes a certain chutzpah. Not every personality type would be able to kill someone any more than a first time deer hunter can necessarily shoot the first deer she encounters. I would think a human life would weigh much more heavily on a normal person's conscience than an animal, thus the emotional fortitude of someone that would shoot someone must be shown before hand. Somewhere early in your story show your character using a lesser strength that your reader can later transfer to, or recall, even subconsciously that verifies your characters ability to do this. Your character will ring true later when this skill or trait is needed. Do this even if you have to back track to add the proof that your heroine would and could act in such a manner. Your reader will reward you for it by becoming a stanch fan tied to your stories.

Trust me when I say, if you spend the time to develop your character fully before you begin your novel, you will have solved ninety percent of your problems before you start. The writing will be that much easier for it. Even your character's name, as you will see, can have a profound impact on your story.

In *Careers for Your Characters*, Raymond Obstfeld and Franz Neumann say, "To create realistic, well-developed characters, you have to write with authority. *Careers*...enables you to describe their professional lives with the accuracy and details of an insider. It covers such things as professional jargon and buzz words, Educational requirements, salaries, benefits, perks, and expenses. Each profession's average daily schedule is shown and how job reality differs from public perception of the job. Obstfeld and Neumann list publications and web sites for further research into your chosen profession.

Patricia Cornwell's novels use the career of forensic pathologist. Cornwell is intimately familiar with the profession and it shows in her work. Others such as James Patterson, Dean Koontz, and John Grisham rely heavily on careers that they were involved in before they became writers. I'm not saying you have to be in any one type of profession to write about it with authority; you only need to research thoroughly to add authenticity to your work. It's not necessarily write what you know; more specifically write what you wish to know. Back it up with solid research and you will know it intimately. You can transfer that knowledge to your characters life and actions making them credible and reliable people.

Creating Character Emotions, by Ann Hood gives the author an in depth look at showing instead of telling character actions and reactions. "Sweaty palms, butterflies in the stomach. Pacing back and forth, show your character being nervous," she says using "...fresh images, words and gestures to evoke feelings in your fiction," will set you apart from the novice. How do you show hate-love-fear-grief-guilt-hope-jealousy and other major emotions Hood provides some insight and answers of how you should put feelings into words? Take a quick check in your own vault of experiences. Think back to a time when you felt any of these emotions. Record what your physical manifestation of the emotion was at the time. This will give you a very accurate means for showing instead of telling. What did you do? What were you feeling how did those feelings translate to physical. In other words, what were the physical expressions of your emotional state? Did your mouth become dry? Did you have an acrid taste in your mouth, a weakness perhaps that threatened to buckle your knees because you were so angry? Were you ever so scared your chest felt squeezed in a giant vice? How does happy feel? What does it taste like? Use all your senses to show in stead of telling your reader what it is you wish to convey.

"Fiction's traditional virtues—depth, empathy, intimacy...good writing must always be vivid, particular and surprising," says Rand Richards Cooper.

"To render character emotions is probably the most important information you can use as a fiction writer," Hood says. Emotions affect every other element of fiction from dialogue and

action to character development. Emotions lead us to more believable plot twists and turns, enhance dramatic tension, help illustrate themes and in short, they inform every aspect of our fiction.

When a reader asks you “How did you know?” When you captured the essence of the emotion for them so exactly in one of your characters because you rendered the emotion so well, so effectively and honestly that your reader believed you had read their mind, or been where they had been, you can feel you have told the truth through your character, made him/her believable and worth the reader’s time and caring.

The Writer’s Path by Todd Walton and Mindy Toomay will lead you through exercises in exploring fiction building that are worth your time. “Stories result from the action of characters. Put an interesting character in a dynamic situation, and you have the makings of a good story,” says Walton and Toomay. The raw material for your stories comes from your characters personal histories. Developing their back-story will show you their motivation and agenda if you pay attention as we have said before.

By providing you with the bibliography, the forms I use when I begin a new novel, and information I’ve learned along the way I hope you will be able to skip the learning curve and jump into developing characters as large as life and novels that speak those truths that need to be told, if only to entertain and enlighten and hold your reader in your story’s embrace.

Write to Entice, Spice up Your Writing
By Billie A Williams
(ISBN coming soon)

So You Want to Write to Entice, Spice up Your Writing
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BEGINNINGS TO THE WORK DAY OF THE MASTERS

Jack Kerouac – used to light a candle at the start of his writing session and extinguish it at the end.

Willa Cather – read a passage from the Bible

Somerset Maugham – donned a certain hat

Stephen King – starts his day with a glass of water or tea, a vitamin and turning on the stereo. He finishes his day by placing a statue of Rocky the Squirrel from the cartoon Rocky & Bullwinkle on his work for the day.

“The cumulative power of doing things the same way everyday seems to be a way of saying to the mind; you’re going to be dreaming soon.”

If you need to get unstuck out of a rut~~ “A simple change can surprise your system and provide a burst of creative inspiration,” says Naomi Epel. *The Observation Deck*

CHAPTER ONE

BEE BALM – THE HOOK, BEAUTY AND ATTRACTION

Bee Balm:

Its fragrance attracts bees. Its Beauty attracts the eye and the butterfly. Its smell intoxicates, hooks the gardener, visitor, casual stranger to come closer, linger a while.

That is what, ideally, your first sentence, but for sure, your first paragraph should do to your reader. It should attract your reader like bees to bee balm, give them the nectar they seek.. Bees suck nectar with their long tubular tongue, Butterflies use their feet to taste—Think of your reader as a voracious cross between butterfly and bee. Give them something to suck on, to immerse themselves in.

Go to your bookshelf and pull a few favorite books from it. Or go to the library and pull a few good books or classics to study the openings. What brings you inside? What calls to your insatiable sweet tooth? What nectar of the gods makes you want to wade in with both feet?

EXAMPLES:

I'm tempted to use Stephen King as an example here because he is so good; but he's been used so much let's look to view lights to illuminate the bee balm of hook.

Jude Deveraux The Mulberry Tree

He needed me. What a great first line. Is it a statement, an excuse, a plea—what is it the reader begs. “When ever anyone-usually a reporter-asked me how I coped with a man like Jimmie, I smiled and said nothing.” But she just said, he needed her, so why—what secret is she holding back, the reader wants to know and why would a

reporter ask in the first place. What was this Jimmie—tyrant or slave owner or...one wonders. Ms. Deveraux has hooked her reader.

James Patterson, *Honeymoon*

Begins with a prologue—don't skip it or introductions when they are in a book as they lay the ground work for what's to follow.

“Things aren't always as they appear. One minute, I'm totally fine. The next, I'm hunched over and clutching my stomach in sheer agony. What the hell is happening to me?”

He goes on to describe the intense and horrific feel of dying via – what? Poison, gunshot, knife wound? Is he dreaming, once again the Bee Balm pulls the ever searching butterfly (you may substitute reader) in for a look see at what's unfolding.

Let's try Michael Crichton, *State of Fear*.

“In the darkness, he touched her arm and said, ‘Stay here.’ She did not move, just waited. The smell of salt water was strong. She heard the faint gurgle of water.

Then the lights came on, reflecting off the surface of a large open tank, perhaps fifty meters long and twenty meters wide. It might have been an indoor swimming pool, except for all the electronic equipment that surrounded it.

And the very strange device at the far end of the pool.”

Right away the reader wants to know what are these people doing? What is this swimming pool that isn't? Water, electronic equipment, my hackles bristle—water and equipment sounds like experiment—are these people scientists thieves, spies involved in espionage—the title *State of Fear* flashes across my mind and I have to read further.

Michael Connelly, *The Harry Bosch Novels* – *Trunk Music*

Has an interesting beginning. One that slowly pulls the reader in but takes a leisurely written first page, as we ride along with Harry Bosch to the scene of a crime in LA. But he pulls us in because first, we want to know about the music he hears—“It came to him in fragments of strings and errant horn sequences, echoing off the brown summer-dried hills and blurred by the white noise of traffic carrying up from the Hollywood Freeway. Nothing he could identify, all he knew was the he was heading toward its source.” He goes on to describe the scene he approaches with squad cars detective cars, yellow crime scene tape “used by the miles in LA,” and a uniformed giant with a Billy club (baton) with the black acrylic paint scratched away to reveal the aluminum beneath. “Street fighters wore their battle-scarred sticks proudly, as a sign, a not so subtle warning. This cop was a head banger.” Then he gives the cop the name “Powers”. The reader needs to know –what is it that happened here calling for all the attention of the police and detectives? Is this cop Powers part of the problem or the solution? What is the music Harry Bosch hears?

Now lets take a look at one or two of the classics, what is it that makes them so enduring—what, how do they hook the reader?

Little Women, By Louisa May Alcott

“Christmas won’t be Christmas with out any presents,” grumbled Jo, lying on the rug.

The first sentence is a tug at your heart strings, whether woman or child, no presents at Christmas—unthinkable you need to know more.

Gone With The Wind, Margaret Mitchell

We begin with a picture of our heroine, Scarlett O’Hara. Her beauty. We want to see her aristocratic life, but it’s the second paragraph that grabs the reader.

“...But for all the modesty of her spreading skirts, the demureness of hair netted smoothly into a chignon and the quietness of small white hands folded in her lap, her true self was poorly concealed. The green eyes in the carefully sweet face were turbulent, willful, lusty with life, distinctly at variance with her decorous demeanor. Her manners had been imposed upon her by her mother’s gentle admonitions and the sterner discipline of her nanny; her eyes were her own.”

Then we begin to wonder what secrets those eyes will reveal as we watch from our perch on the tip of Margaret Mitchell’s pen.

I can’t leave this topic without looking at my three favorite authors.

Patricia Cornwell, Trace

“Yellow Bulldozers hack earth and stone in an old city block, that has seen more death than most modern wars, and Kay Scarpetta slows her rental SUV almost to a stop. Shaken by the destruction ahead, savaging her past.

“Someone should have told me,” she says.”

This beginning is loaded with questions. Between the Yellow Bulldozers, earth and stone, we are tempted to think cemetery because we see the words more death than modern war—where else? But we’re thrown by “the old city block,” and why would or should someone have told her—Kay Scarpetta. As you continue you were plunged deeper into questions, plot, reasons and the definitions of the main character.

“Where you used to work when you were young and full of hopes and dreams and

believed in love, well..."We need to know—used to work? No longer young? Why come back, and more questions crowd in and beg to be answered.

Mary Higgins Clark, *My Gal Sunday; A Crime of Passion*

"Beware the fury of a patient man," Henry Parker Britland IV observed sadly as he studied the picture of his former secretary of state. He had just learned that his close friend and political ally had been indicted for the murder of his lover, Arabella Young."

As we continue we get seeds of Henry Britland's life at the moment. The questions form his pampered wife. We know where we are and many circumstances of the person accused of the murder and more. We are invited to be in privy to the lives of aristocratic indulgence.

Questions—oh yes, tons of questions.

Do you see a pattern here? When an author peaks your curiosity—when questions jump out in the mind of the reader—the need to know grabs us on the author's hook and we are tethered for the journey.

Everything you read tries to snag you away from the myriad of other distractions with which you may be inundated. Children's stories, if they're good are no exception, in fact they are a greater challenge for the writer – the good part is the naturally inquisitive nature of the young.

Frances Hodgson Burnett, has a power, a magnificent grace with her words that draws the reader. *The Little Princess* tugs you in and bets you to lose yourself in the adventures of a delightful little girl, but it all began earlier with *The Secret Garden*.

“When Mary Lennox was sent to Misselthwaite Manor to live with her uncle everybody said she was the most disagreeable looking child ever seen”

Why, we want to know and how does one look disagreeable? Hodgson Burnett, continues and supplies those answers, but then the reader wants to know why a child so young could, would be sent away and why she would be allowed to get away with being such a disagreeable child – and why then was she sent to her uncle in the first place.

You Try: Now let’s try one on our own.

“Life offers you a thousand choices and this is what you choose,” Alexa said throwing her hands in the air in defeat. (This is our first sentence for each – what follows in each category will be the second, and subsequent sentences)

--Does that pull you in? What questions do you want answered right away?

If we continue on we could turn this in to an A. Comedy, B. Mystery, C. Romance, or any genre you want to write.

Let’s try:

A. (Comedy) She bent down and retrieved the chicken suit. Slipping first one foot then the other into the yellow and white costume, marabou feathers tickled her nose and breathed into her mouth with every breath.

“Hey, you wanted to cater children’s parties, so you get to be the chicken,” Cathe said giggling at Alexa’s struggle with the feathers and wings that wouldn’t move like arms are supposed to.

“But I wasn’t planning to be a billboard sign standing on the corner of Edenton’s busiest street handing out flyers to motorists who are paused at the stoplight. I feel like a nut.”

Cathe cocked her head and raised an eyebrow, “and…” she said with a shrug.

Or—B – A mystery

B. Alexa bent over the body to feel for a pulse. The yellow chicken suit was smudged with mud, the feathers matted with the dark red stain around the knife standing perpendicular to Garrison’s chest. “I told you it was too dangerous,” she whispered. Her badge glinted in the sun, swiftly sliding down the skyline. She reached for the radio on her shoulder. “Officer down, in the alley at Wells and Gossamer,” she spoke her voice uneven, detached from the personal angst she was feeling.

C. C-Romance

Alexa watched as Jerard drove his bucket of rusting Chevy into the driveway of the parking lot beside the building. He had been her high school sweetheart before they went their separate ways. She to Harvard law school and he went to the University of Minnesota on a football scholarship. They had stayed in touch all those years, there was no romance left, and now he needed her. Alexa slid her hand across the leather embossed name plate on her desk. Becoming a full partner in the prestigious law firm of Bacon, Taylor and Mercedes had been a hard won feather in her cap. Some football player, turned rock singer just didn’t fit

in her plans at the moment. The intercom buzzed, “Jerard Klew here to see you,” the secretary’s voice laced with derision and rudeness announced.

Jerard sauntered in and plopped the chicken suit on her desk. “Here it is, I want to sue the jerk,” he said slamming his body into the chair across from her desk sprawling his long legs wide, his arms bent and hung on the back of the chair.

Arrogant, crossed her mind as a description of his behavior as she felt the electricity of his gaze undoing her composure as he always did.

Questions—Oh I’m sure you could come up with better beginnings than I’ve offered you.

Don’t stop with mine – do some of your own.

EXERCISES:

1. Pull five of your favorite books from you shelves or the local libraries shelves. Sit down and copy word for word, the hook--- the sentence, first paragraph or what ever you think provides the hook. Until you are teeming with questions to ask the author – ask yourself what is it that is pulling you in to read more of this particular book?
2. Do this with at least five books to get the feel for it.
3. Then write your questions and read to see if they are answered and how long before the author answers them—how did the author give them up. Were they all at once or sprinkled nearly through the whole book?
4. Now write five of your own hooks.
5. Then use one of them to write the first paragraph or page of a story, if you feel so inclined continue until you run out of words to apply to that particular hook and then start again with the next.

SIDE BAR: *How to Hook a Reader*

1. Name the character
2. Tell something significant about the plot
3. Show a personality quirk of one of the characters
4. Illustrate (show don't tell) a character's attitude.
5. Show the way the narrative mind works
6. Give something of the plot, a clue, a trick, or foreshadow one of these.
7. Lead the reader into excitement using strong action verbs, emotions, feelings – your five senses. Powerful feelings – will draw the reader in

8. Hint of a major challenge facing your main character
9. And don't forget to raise key questions about what's going to happen next.

Render a mysterious or suspenseful occurrence.

