



FLASHWORDS!

New England Crime Bake™

2010



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We challenged the folks attending the 2010 New England Crime Bake to write a compelling crime story in 150 words or less, using at least ten of twenty title words from novels by our Guest of Honor, Charlaine Harris!

We received 50 official entries displaying a wide variety of styles and a depth of talent and creativity.

The winners, selected with great difficulty in blind judging, and in no particular order, are:

“The Butler Did It!”

By Judith Green

“Paying Respects”

By Linda Flaherty Haltmaier

“What Happens in the Family—Stays in the Family”

By Mary E. Stibal

“Dead to Me and Worse, I Paid for Law School”

By Paula Matter

Congratulations and thank you to all who participated with such enthusiasm. Enjoy!

Title Words: *Bedroom, Bone, Club, Corpse, Counselor, Dark, Dead, Family, Fool, Grave, Heels, Ice, Landlord, Living, Pick, Scene, Secret, Surprise, Trollup, Worse*

**DEAD TO ME AND WORSE,
I PAID FOR LAW SCHOOL**

By Paula Matter

I didn't have to pick the lock, thanks to the foolish landlord. Grateful he didn't know about Vinnie recently dumping me for that trollop at the VFW club, I moved quickly through my ex-fiancé's living room and into the bedroom. I grabbed Vinnie's revolver, then hurried to the VFW.

Now, crouched over her corpse, the gun resting against my hip bone, I pictured the scene outside my cramped, dark hiding place. Vinnie's family--the rotten heels--had decided to go through with the unnecessary-but-paid-for bachelor party. An excuse to celebrate Vinnie winning his first case.

I had five bullets left. One for each of them.

I waited for the secret signal--what would've been Trollop's cue to jump out of the cake.

"Grave situation, Counselor, we're out of ice!"

I put a smile on my face, my finger on the trigger, pushed the hinged lid up and yelled, "Surprise!"

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MURDER UNDERFOOT

By Vicki Doudera

He was tall, dark, and dead, a family counselor who favored cheap cologne and cowboy boots.

I'd arrived at the scene minutes before. Late for my appointment with the now-cooling corpse, I'd stopped at a club and downed a draft beer, then shooed off a skinny trollop who was tailing me like a dog on a bone.

He'd been shot in the head, but what got my attention were the heels of his boots. Coated in mud, they'd left tracks in the apartment and worse still, on the new carpeting in the hall.

"Guy's a slob," I muttered to the landlord, who lingered in the living room, silent as the grave, the keys to the joint clutched in his fist.

And then I saw it – metal protruding from a pocket. With nerves of ice, I sprang.

"Wanna know a secret?"

The killer nodded, surprised.

"Only a fool installs white shag."

FAMILY PHOTOS

By Betsy Bitner

Insurance. That's the career my guidance counselor suggested, but I chose to make a living with photography. Extortion and blackmail my specialty. I should've stayed out of it when my sister asked if Nick, her bone-headed husband, was cheating on her. Business and family don't mix.

But I followed him to a club anyway, where he met some cheap trollop with high heels and low self-esteem. I caught the whole scene on film, then I told Nick what it would take to keep me quiet. Grave mistake.

Who knew the fool would turn the tables on me? I was surprised to find the camera in my bedroom. Forget for better or worse, *my* marriage would be over if my secret got out.

I wait in the dark for Nick. He's expecting money. He's getting an ice pick to the jugular instead. My own form of insurance.

Ω

“THE BUTLER DID IT”

By Judith Green

“Well, Counselor,” said Reginald, swirling his gin-and-tonic, “now that he’s dead, Father has no more secrets.” He held his drink out to the butler. “Smithson! More ice!”

They’d gathered in the mansion’s living room: Mrs. Cuthbertson, fashionably dieted to skin and bones; Reginald; his sister Margeurite, a little trollop in skin-tight dress and six-inch heels; and Branton, in from his club. A touching little scene. But his family rarely saw old Ezekial after illness confined him to his darkened bedroom, and his corpse barely hit the grave before the fools clamored to hear the will.

Now the surprise. For Smithson had—well, *convinced* Ezekial to alter his will. To pick...the most deserving.

The lawyer cleared his throat. “It seems that the entire estate was left to Mr. Smithson.”

“Our mansion?” Reginald looked bilious.

“Our *butler*?” His mother looked worse.

Smithson bowed. “Your new landlord. And, Reginald, get your own ice!”

EVERYBODY WANTS TO LIVE FOREVER

By Gwynyth Mislin

My brother, Freddie, dropped by last night with an armful of dead, blonde trollop. She was model-thin and boney in dark satin, red high heels, and matching lipstick. The pupils of her ice-blue eyes were, to my dismay, fixed and dilated.

“I met her at the Bedroom Club, Sis,” Freddie whined. “She said she loved the whole vampire, living dead scene, and she picked me to turn her.”

“Turn her into a vampire, fool, not a corpse!”

“Honest, I really tried. I’m ok at changeovers...a little worse at reanimation.”

“No kidding.”

“Maybe she’ll surprise us and wake up later on?”

“Wake up? Did any of the other girls wake up, Freddie? Did your landlord? How about that school counselor, has he popped out of his grave yet?”

“Those are family secrets, Sis, you promised!”

“Fine. But the next time you turn up with a corpse, I’m telling Mother!”

BLOODY TUESDAY

By Mary S. Barker

It should have been a secret bedroom scene, but the foolish corpse was more suitable to the grave than a romance novel.

The counselor cooled his heels till they turned to ice waiting for the landlord to open the door.

It came as no surprise that the bony trollop was dead. Her throat was slit from ear to ear. The question? “Who in her family is responsible?” My pick was her ex-husband Joey. He claimed he was at a movie. Yeah, right. Who goes to movies these days? In a Victorian story, he’d have been at his club and had a good alibi.

His story? “It was dark, so nobody saw me.”

The police didn’t believe him. Neither did I.

Actually, Joey was living a lie. He pretended not to care, but he was jealous of Tuesday and her paramours.

Worse than that, he did her in.

PAYING RESPECTS

By Linda Flaherty Haltmaier

Corpses sure puff up, Kristen thought, wrenching the pump back and forth. She'd be damned if these kitten-heeled Manolos would go to the grave with her best friend. She had been a fool to let Lilly swipe them out from under her at the Bloomie's last chance sale. *But then, that's just the kind of girl I am.*

Voices seeped through the mahogany door. The time was now. Kristen hoisted her Chanel-clad bones into the casket, straddled the ice-cold body, and got to work. The dead limb relinquished its secret with a suctioning gasp. She repeated the gruesome scene and with a heel in each fist, unfurled her crouch to rise triumphant. Then came the breathy sigh from beneath her. A cocktail of satin and terror upended Kristen as the dark floorboards sped towards her.

The minister consoled two grieving families that day. "A rare friendship indeed."

**WHAT HAPPENS IN THE FAMILY—
STAYS IN THE FAMILY**

By Mary E. Stibal

Every family has at least one dark secret, and as the oldest son it's my role to make sure the skeleton in our closet doesn't ever clank its way out. I first heard the rumor thirty years ago about a grave on our property. But it was just talk. I know for sure no one saw my father pull a dead body out of the trunk of his Chevy that rainy night.

Except me, looking out my bedroom window.

I watched him drag the corpse across the lawn and bury it in our meadow. I never said anything because I'm no fool. Our randy landlord John disappeared that same weekend, and my father told everyone he probably "ran off with a trollop."

Yesterday the Mayor offered again to buy our meadow for a new high school, and I said, "No, I won't ever sell. It has so many family memories."

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THE SECRETS WE KEEP

By Dianne Herlihy

During the blizzard of '78 I accepted a ride from a counselor who frequented the club I worked in. I'd served him once and although he hadn't tipped me, I figured that made him cheap, not dangerous.

It surprised me when he passed my exit. "Oh, Peter, you missed my exit."

"I'll do the drivin', darlin', you just stay quiet and don't do anything foolish."

"Peter, I..." He slammed his forearm into my chest.

"I said, shut up." The intensity of his tone chilled my bones.

We swerved on the ice and came to a stop in front of a darkened building. He lit a cigarette, so I reached into my purse for mine and felt my tiny sewing scissors.

When Peter's corpse was discovered, the scene held no clues. The punctures to his eyes and carotid artery could have been made with anything and would remain my little secret.

By Tanya Goodwin

On his way to the crime scene in the dark night, chilled to the bone, Detective Phil Morris pushed up his coat collar. He had just snuck out the back door of The Trollop Club. Digging his hand into his pocket, he crumbled the note the dancer had slipped him. He was no fool. A family man, he planned to take his secret obsession to his grave.

Walking up the steps of the brownstone, his heels crunched the rock salt sprinkled on the concrete. Morris ducked under the tape.

After nodding to the landlord, he walked through the living room and into the bedroom. He gaped in surprise.

The corpse lying on the bed with an ice pick through her heart was the dancer who hours ago had passed him her phone number.

BAD ASSUMPTION

By Vincent H. O'Neil

“Thought you’d want to see this, Counselor.” The cemetery manager pointed his flashlight at the disturbed earth of the grave.

“I’m not really surprised.” The lawyer said, inspecting the dark hole. “It’s no secret some members of the family were concerned about the items buried with him.”

“Think they did this?” the manager waved at the desecrated scene.

“I hope not. Stealing an heirloom is one thing, but taking a corpse is much worse.”

“Why would anyone steal the dead body of a cripple?”

“He wasn’t crippled – he just had a clubbed foot. Dragged it, sort of.”

Both men stopped when they heard a rasping sound coming toward them. They flicked their flashlights in the direction of the noise and then, without a word, ran away as fast as they could.

The sound continued to grow, taking on a definite rhythm as it approached the grave.

Tro-llop. Tro-llop. Tro-llop.

“THE TALE OF BERNADETTE MAHON”

By Liz Trinchera

Bernadette Mahon was a beautiful Irish lass.
At least she was, until a pint of ale filled her glass.
Her family and friends said “The liquor makes you a slave.
Living over a pub will dig you an early grave.”

She ignored their warnings and spent each night at the bar,
Until the evening she pushed the bartender too far.
“Leave my pub, you trollop,” he shouted, “and don't come
back!”
The next morning, to his surprise, she'd emptied his rack.

With the landlord at his heels, right up the stairs he flew.
He pounded on her door, “I've a bone to pick with you!”
They opened the door and made their way to the bedroom.
There she lay, cold as ice, having met her final doom.

Bottles around her corpse, the scene assaulted their eyes.
Booze had left the fool dead, a truly Irish demise.

DEAD MEAT

By Dennis Hoffman

Kendra reluctantly left the warm security of her bed, shivering in the early morning air. Still *dark* outside, she *picked* her way from the *bedroom* to the kitchen, mindful not to wake her sleeping *family*. Flipping on the overhead light, she let out a piercing shriek of *surprise*. There, in the middle of the floor, lay a *corpse*!

No, not again!

There was no need to check the grey body for a pulse, it was *dead*. The eyes fixed in an *icy*, blank stare, the *bones* crushed and little or no blood, it was no *secret* who the killer was.

Turning to leave the crime *scene*, Kendra collided with her attorney husband, holding his beloved Darcy.

“You little *trollop*!” she growled at Darcy. “Get rid of it, *Counselor*,” she nodded toward the body.

“What?” he asked *foolishly*.

“Your cat there killed another mouse!”

BONES

By Kourtney Heintz

My wife hated dead things. Corpses and graves brought on panic attacks. I spent twenty years living with her fear, navigating our family around it. Every Halloween, things got worse.

This year, she decided to face her fear.

It was no surprise that I ended up sitting beside her in a cemetery after dark. Her teeth chattered, but she refused to leave.

I stood up. "Don't be foolish. You're freezing."

A secret swam in her moss green eyes. "I was six when I found my first dead body."

"What?"

Her voice turned to ice. "It was my mother."

I dropped back down on the cold ground.

"Daddy bashed her head in with an iron skillet."

She'd said she was an orphan. "Where's he?"

She smiled. "I caught up with him one Halloween."

Dear God. She couldn't.

She shivered. "I never realized how hard it was to get rid of bones."

TWILIGHT SLEEP

By Lisa Mathews

Candace darkly swirled the ice in her third bourbon. She was bone-tired and she had a killer headache. Sloan's guidance counselor had awakened her from a dead sleep to give her the grave news: Her stepdaughter had missed another week of school. Well, no surprise there. It was hardly a secret that Sloan hit the clubs every night, sneaking back into her bedroom before dawn to avoid a family scene. Their landlord had once reported the brat stumbling through his living room, stiletto heels in hand and clearly worse for the wear. With all that corpse-hued foundation and blood-red lipstick, he'd probably taken her for a vampire. The guidance counselor claimed Sloan could have her pick of colleges if she cleaned up her act. But Candace was no fool. That little trollop would never leave her bedroom again—and now she'd finally get her wish to sleep in a coffin.

SOMNAMBULIST

By David Courmoyer

Frank staggers through the silent house. The night clings like tar, sticky and dark. He collides with an ice-cold wall of glass. The impact smashes his nose and rocks him back on his heels. He sidesteps until the partition opens. His troubled mind sees Laurie kneeling beside the corpse of his friend, Jeff. Frank dashes forward and plunges into a bottomless grave. A scream fights bile for space in his throat.

Awakened by his own scream, Frank opens his eyes. He is in the bedroom of Jeff's widow. He has fallen across the foot of her bed. "What am I doing here?"

Laurie sits up. "I'm surprised too. Was the couch that uncomfortable or have you changed your mind?"

Frank picks himself up. "I'll help you look for Jeff's killer tomorrow."

"What about me? Jeff is dead but I'm living." Laurie pats the covers. "Please stay tonight."

Frank stays.

SURPRISES

By Linda Lee Doll

Today I come home to find a dead body in my bedroom – my landlord’s wife strangled and laid out on my bed, a place where I often exchange sex for rent. I’m not surprised he finally killed her – she was a real bitch. But what a creep to leave her here. Bad enough he thinks I’m a trollop, but much worse to think I’m a fool he can pin a murder on.

I wrap the corpse in my sheets and carry it downstairs to reunite the charming family in the place where she’d undoubtedly been murdered. The cheapskate’s lock is easily opened with a credit card. I deposit the body on their bed and take back my sheets. DNA won’t matter because my living arrangement is no secret to the other tenants.

Problem is, this will really mess up my budget. I sure hope the new landlord likes me.

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THE FAMILY MAN'S SECRET TROLLOP

By Laurie B. Barker

Her landlord came to collect the rent. It was late and getting dark.

He knocked but no one answered, so because the counselor was never late with her rent and he hadn't seen her in days, he used his key to get in.

On his way through the living room, he tripped over a pair of red high heels that she'd left by the couch. He got a worse surprise in the bedroom. There was a corpse in the bed with an ice pick in her chest. On the wall splattered in red was a note: "Here lies a family man's secret trollop."

It was a grave scene. He fled the room and immediately dialed 911.

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THE GUMSHOE WORE HEELS

By Brenda Buchanan

When Basil invited me to his family's holiday bash I neglected to ask about the dress code. Grave mistake.

It turned out to be a high heels kind of soiree. For a Bean boot gal like me, there's no worse challenge than walking in stilettos while under the influence of nerves.

The afternoon of the party a nor'easter blew up the coast. Ice glazed the porch steps like honey on a raised donut when I poked the toes of my new Louboutins outside.

Picking my way down the dark driveway, I was halfway to my car when a muffled gunshot sent me into a skid. A window box was all that stood between me and the Broken Bone Club. Clutching at crispy dead mums, legs splayed north and south, I wound up face-first against my landlord's bedroom window.

We all have our secrets. Hers was such a surprise.

Ω

DEAD IN DEDHAM

By Pryce M. Jones

The unpublished trollop brandished the silver ice pick with the bloodied point tipped in the air like a witch's wand as she stalked the cozy midlist author. He was dead before his bones hit the club room floor. The trollop snatched a note from the fool's limp hand.

In a dark hotel bedroom she surprised a sleeping family counselor whose amateur PI made his living as a landlord. She turned him into a corpse by plunging her stiletto heel in his heart. She tucked his secret notebook in her apron pocket.

In a bloody scene she pulled the pick from the thriller writer's jugular vein, sending him to an early grave, but not before securing his crib notes.

In the pitch session things could have been worse. The agent didn't warm to the trollop's serial killer but she still had a cozy, an amateur PI and a thriller to offer.

RETURN TO THE SCENE

By Mary S. Fishler-Fisk

“Bedroom.” Sgt. Boner’s unlit stogy jabbed toward the dark hallway terminating in a lattice of yellow crime scene tape. “Used a golf club. Nine iron. Won’t never see a bloodier corpse, Counselor.”

I didn’t doubt it.

When a family as wealthy as the Picketts calls..., hey, a struggling attorney with big student loans would be a fool to turn down an extra grand just to take a look at young master Pickett’s secret trollop, as his mother had so indelicately put it. A gal’s gotta make a living, and I don’t mean the dead whore who’d surprised her landlord on his weekly collection visit.

“Take a peek?”

Boner nodded. “Don’t touch nothin’.”

The place was cold as ice and, beyond the clickity-echo of my stiletto heels over worn linoleum, as still as the grave.

Boner wasn’t wrong.

I’ve iced ’em worse, never bloodier. Junior Pickett better pay up, or else.

TRUE HAPPINESS

By Lisa Haselton

It's no secret I'm happiest with sunlight, heat, and watching my favorite comedies. Do I have that now? No.

I'm away from the laughs and warm bedroom. Worse, I get to visit a graveyard on a dark night so cold I swear I have icicles for bones.

I'm beyond cranky.

Surprise, Sergeant Joe Obvious is on scene. Cash in my winning lottery ticket.

"Hey, Captain. Turn that frown upside down."

"Can it. What do we have?"

"A dead corpse."

"That's redundant."

"I know, but it's fun watching you snarl. Guess what? This trollop was murdered."

"Based on the ice pick sticking out of her head, right?"

"Hardly, you can see that's fake from sixty paces. Want to take another stab at it?"

I did.

My knife entered his chest like the first poke into a Halloween pumpkin.

I discovered happiness in a new form and giggled like a fool.

THE STEAK KNIFE MURDER

By Louisa Clerici

My secret – I’ve wanted to be a detective since I was sixteen and read *The Hound of the Baskervilles* under a cave of blankets in my bedroom. I thought I could solve everything. I longed for a cold corpse and a dark mystery. My family thought I was a fool, sent me to secretarial school but I longed for a suspenseful life. One day a dead body finally crossed my path. Myrtle Stroud in 4B was stabbed in her sleep.

My investigative mind flew to Mr. Carlos Von Kitteridge, our landlord. You’d pick him out of any lineup. He was odd. I’d caught him wearing women’s heels in the laundry room. I’d long suspected him of something, fraud, no fashion taste or worse. Alas, police said that Myrtle had simply turned over. Turns out she slept with a steak knife under her blanket. Moral? Sleep with a thriller instead.

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A GHOST, A CHILD, A MURDER

By Cheryl Damberger

Sara, the ghost in our new Parisian home, warned me that our landlord, a dark fool, slippery as my heels on ice, had a secret.

A clue came in a dream. I must find a trunk, but the attic was forbidden by our landlord.

Sara guided me into that intimidating place. Mysteriously, a key appeared that allowed me to open the dusty trunk. I screamed.

My parents came running and witnessed what I saw.

The Gendarmes arrived and were shocked. A corpse!

I told them I dreamt of our landlord beating Sara in an attic bedroom. A trap for our landlord was set.

Arriving and seeing me in the attic, he swung a club at me. Sara appeared and our landlord shamefully bowed down to beg her forgiveness. Suddenly, he grabbed his chest and fell.

*Dead...*the Gendarmes declared!

Sara, moving towards a great light, thanked me for setting her free.

ONE DROP TOO MANY

By Nikki Bonanni

Grant lay awake, the bedroom in complete darkness, listening to the constant drip. For weeks he had asked Mr. Evans to fix the faucet. His interview was in seven hours and he needed sleep. Jumping out of bed, he pulled a sweatshirt over his head and slipped into his well-worn crocs as he headed downstairs to confront the landlord.

The hallway was dead silent as Grant pounded on the door. When there was no sign of movement, he knocked again, rousing those in neighboring apartments.

“Come on Evans, open up.”

Grant turned the doorknob and it opened easily. He walked into the living room and there was Evans, an ice pick embedded in his chest.

Grant heard, “You fool, what have you done?”

He looked up in surprise to see the old guy from next door. Even worse, he was holding the note Grant left Evans yesterday.

FALL FROM GRACE

By Avis Crane

The corpse behind Club Trollop was like ice when I arrived at the scene. Bone showed through the rent in his scalp, but little blood. I'd seen worse. Still, I was surprised how touched I was by this dead fool, alone in the dark. Late teens, maybe. Thin, like he'd been hungry. Dark hoodie and jeans, frayed. Sneakers with holes in the heels. He should have been asleep in his bedroom, with family, not lying here like the afterthought of a too-short life.

"What have we got?" I asked the nearby cop.

"The landlord let us up on the roof. There's blood."

I slipped the wallet out of the boy's back pocket, opened it. "Damn. It's Counselor Grave's son. The one that's been missing."

I picked out a folded paper. "Huh, note from Dad – no deal on the blackmail, eh?" This time, the living won't get to keep their secrets.

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TIT FOR TAT

By Libby Mussman

Through her bedroom window, Madge could see her neighbor trudging home, his shoulders caved over as if protecting a secret. While washing windows downstairs, she'd heard three long blasts of the whistle signaling the close of the factory's final day.

She wondered how his family would cope with living expenses. Once when she spoke with him, he showed no desperation at the loss of his pension and insurance, benefits dead to him now. "Worse thing this fool could'a done was give nineteen years to one place," was all he said.

The house shook, windows rattled, as an unexpected blast ripped from the factory. She stared in horrified surprise as he leaped with his arms in the air, lunch pail swinging, and heels clicking.

Anxious people gathered in a chaotic scene watching dark smoke advance.

Madge sighed, "At least I haven't washed that side of the house yet."

A FOOL'S GRAVE

By Edith Maxwell

His grave still smells of the dead. The family gathers around it. The corpse, my landlord and occasional patient, Pete Hellas, won't give up the secret now. He was a stingy, slovenly, diabetic fool. His stupid son, Spiro, and his trollop of a wife are even worse. The dark-haired son I wouldn't dare pick a fight with. The daughter? President of the Bonehead Club. A pitiful bunch.

I slip away from the scene, careful of my heels on the new ice. They'll be surprised when Counselor Adams reads my name in the will. Seducing Pete in his bedroom and persuading him to leave me the apartment building was worth touching his disgusting body. I'm done working as an underpaid nurse. I'll evict the family and the renters, condo-ize the units, and sell off all but mine. So I gave him a little extra insulin. It's my turn for living.

LAUGHING LADY

By Elizabeth Hanson

It was down a dark twisted road past a corpse of trees that lead to the tavern. The sign read: *Laughing Lady (No trollops tolerated)*.

A fat woman met us saying, “Everyone calls me ‘Ma Trucker’, cause I drove a big rig... Welcome!”

Ben asked, “Where is Mr. Trucker?”

“Oh honey,” she sighed. “No one’s been in my bedroom for years! So funny man, I’ve a bone to pick with you. You’re late.”

“Maybe,” he agreed.

“What fools men are!” She said. Ben rolled his eyes.

I figured the scene was set. I went out for a smoke. A storm was coming up fast. Back inside things were getting interesting too. Ben looked sullen. “The old cow won’t pay us, some day I’m going to kill one of these club owners!”

That was when the lights blew, back on Ben was gone. Ma Trucker lay dead where Ben should’ve been.

JANUARY THAW

By J.E. Seymour

Christopher had it planned to the last detail. Nobody was going to make him out to be a fool. That trollop would get what she deserved. Or worse. He had it all planned. His weapon, a dagger of ice plucked from the gables, would simply melt away. He could show complete surprise when the police showed up to find the corpse. He'd been waiting all winter, keeping his secret. He stepped outside, surprised by the warmth of the dark January night. He broke off an icicle, tucked it under his coat, and stepped up to her front door. He could feel the cold water running down his leg as he picked the lock. It left drops on the living room floor. Why was her house so hot? He opened the door to the bedroom, leapt to the bed, and raised his ice dagger as it melted into a puddle.

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HEARTFELT

By Cassy Pickard

She stood over the grave. The memories of those three days would long be with her. Caroline could still see it as clearly as if she were standing there. The boney white arm stretched across the bed. The dark room, a sliver of light from the gap in the shades. The faint odor of dank and must. A setting fit for the dead. She now doubted her role in the family chaos as her gift of flowers caught in the breeze, dancing across the newly piled dirt.

Ice slipped over the heels of her shoes as the wind picked up. The last few leaves of the season circled at her feet, mingling with the yellows and reds in the small bouquet. The family thought her a fool, or maybe worse. But, this was a time for the living, no matter who learned the secret.

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DIRTY DEEDS

By A. Gordian

I walked into the dark bedroom lugging the heavy cleaning cart behind me. The scene before me when I switched on the light chilled me to the bone. Not for the first time, I wondered what kind of a fool I was to clean crime scenes for a living. The unmade bed was drenched in red with the outline of the corpse. I walked over to the nightstand. There was a picture of a smiling young woman and a man embracing. I recognized her from the newspaper. The surprise suicide of the beloved guidance counselor was a shock to the family and the community. I flicked on the television while I got to work on the sheets. The news was showing a picture of her funeral with the man in the photo leaning heavily on a gorgeous redhead in a tight black dress. Everyone seemed devastated. Well, almost everyone.

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DOUBLE CLUB

By Barbara Emrys

She still dressed like a trollop but now ran the southside Family, worse luck. In here, she said, like a landlord touring a prospective tenant. The corpse lay relaxed, as though still living. I flipped on a light in the dark bedroom. Her teeth-sharp heels tapped behind me as I looked. Well, Counselor? My secret self lay dead, eyes closed over my bones. Her iced-martini voice said, Fool me once, bad enough. Fool me with twins, that's a grave offense. She'd always watched me, but I could be in two places, the perfect undercover pick. I touched his chest and said his name. Closed my fingers around the handkerchief in his breast pocket. Turned and threw the caustic power it held in her face. Her gun went off; then it changed hands. My lawyer brother stayed behind. I was the one who left the scene. Surviving surprised me once again.

THE TENANT

By Liz Mugavero

He thought I was the fool. That his secret would remain buried in the dark recesses of this house, deep as a dog buries a bone in its shallow grave.

Well, it was his turn for a surprise. He never expected me to be in this dark bedroom when he returned, finally, to accept his responsibility.

Worse than any others, and there had been many. I knew how to pick them, for sure.

My hand tightened on my ice pick. Bastard. A member of that club of bastards known for their treachery. Worse, even, than lawyers. Thought I would turn on my heels and run.

But here I was.

As I pounced, I saw the puddles of water from the broken pipe, the pieces of plaster from the caved-in ceiling. He saw them too. Then he was dead.

My next landlord would think twice about not completing the repairs.

BAD TIMING

By Kat Fast

The only scene that could be worse would be her family discovering her secret life as a trollop. Admit it, as a whore. Better off dead than living. The landlord would discover her corpse. She'd taken the pain pills earlier. Now, she drew a deep breath and sliced her wrist to the bone with a razor.

Damn, the doorbell! She couldn't be found alive. She wrapped a towel around her wrist, crossed through the bedroom, and peered out the apartment door peephole. In the dark hallway stood that fool counselor armed with more unwanted advice. She cracked open the door. "This isn't a good—"

"Oh, but it is," the man exclaimed. He glanced at the blood seeping from the towel. "Tasty," he said, fixing her with an icy stare. "Surprise."

His fangs sank into her neck, severing her scream. She'd never rest in her grave after all.

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DEADLY SURPRISE

By Carol Perry

In the dark, the grave window scene rattled my bones. Ice sparkled on the corpses of my John and his lovely Susanne, sprawled on the front lawn, for all to see.

Did he really think he could keep his dalliance secret? Family and friends warned me. Even the landlord chimed in, claiming that Susanne wasn't John's only paramour.

"You were right," I whispered. "I finally believe you all." I poured the remaining cyanide down the drain and tossed the box into the fireplace.

Now what. They're dead and I'm a wreck. My confidant and counselor, Nanette LeFleur, assures me the jury will believe a murder/suicide pact. They'll say I couldn't have managed their bodies out there. I wish I hadn't sent that threatening text to the little trollop. Nanette says that won't even come up.

What's with her?

Something tells me I'm in for a deadly surprise.

PREMIERE

By Mysti Berry

We kept the scene a secret from our trollop of an actress. Without it, Oksana's bedroom shenanigans and round heels were just good fun. With it, the audience knew that her movie character was a dark counselor in the art of family betrayal, as she had been in real life when she'd married her foolish daughter to the living corpse of an aged banker. Oksana was landlord of the Bone Club, they said, pimping out her child for a guaranteed retirement income. Only she hadn't counted on her daughter's surprise: revenge. An affair with me, the screenwriter, should have been a dead giveaway. No one sleeps with the screenwriter.

At the premiere, Oksana felt the audience turn against her, an ice pick to the heart. Losing her fans was far worse than losing her daughter. Oksana staggered out of the premiere haunted by the shadow of her own grave.

Ω

SURPRISE

By Marcia Withiam-Wilson

There are few things worse than waking up in your childhood bedroom in the old family home with some trollop whose name remains a secret. But discovering that the trollop is a corpse is one of them. Bemoaning the fact that I am apparently still the bone headed fool I keep promising to outgrow, I slip out of bed, heading for the bathroom in the dark, and promptly trip over a pair of high heels. I pick up one of the offending shoes and feel the slickness of what I expect will turn out to be blood. Did I club the girl to death? I've got to stop living like this. But first, I've got to do something about the dead body.

Ω

ICE COLD

By Marian Lanouette

I hated Eileen. She's such a trollop. Here she comes prancing in like she's the counselor of the year; ready to fix everything for the poor family of the victim. Eileen had on those ridiculous high heels she always wore. I don't know how she walked in them. She tripped over the corpse, and how inappropriate; she giggled and had the landlord appraising her.

I pointed to the bedroom to let her know that's where we were holding the wife. I stayed in the dining room watching the crime scene techs clean up the bone china that was shattered in what looked like the fight of the century. No big surprise here, the wife killed the husband. He was dead the minute she plunged the ice pick right through his heart. I walked into the bedroom to arrest the wife and read her her rights; the charge murder one.

NOT A GOOD DAY

By Cheryl Ullyot

It was dark when I left the club. My family surprised me by showing up at dinner unannounced. They called me a fool. Insisted I see a counselor. I caused a scene by hurling an ice cube at mother, then smashing a bone china teacup with my heel. I stormed out, leaving them to pick up the tab.

On the way home I cut through the cemetery to visit the grave. What did they know anyway? She was just a trollop. Now they were trying to interfere as usual, by threatening to expose my secret. Sometimes I wish they were dead.

When I reached my apartment I was still fuming. Then just when I thought things couldn't get worse, I find my landlord standing in my bedroom, staring down at the corpse in my bed.

“Oh great,” I thought, “Now I really won't be invited to Thanksgiving.”

PRIVATE TRUST

By Pete Morin

The bones of the Graves Family mansion creaked. Dust caked the mahogany woodwork. Threadbare Persian rugs littered the scuffed hardwood floors. Dingy crystal chandeliers hung dark, lifeless.

The pallid, naked corpse of Silas Graves lay sprawled on a living room couch, white foam thick on its blue lips. With the remains of the family's vast fortune and sterling history in his hands, the last heir had composed a squalid scene upon which to close its books.

"Detective," I said.

"Counselor."

"Overdose?"

"Evidently," he said, frowning. "Life insurance policy?"

"In his bedroom desk, I believe."

"Ah," Detective Wills said. "Beneficiary of the Estate?"

"The Graves *Charitable Trust*."

"Trustee?"

"A Cayman Islands company. Silascorp, Ltd."

"So that's it then?" He cracked a thin smile.

I returned it. "A suite at Grand Cayman Club awaits, darling."

"Well done, counselor."

"Keep a secret?"

He nodded.

I whispered in his ear. "Call me *Madam Trustee*."

ANOTHER BODY FOUND

By Lindsay Downs

Agent Emily Dahill, aka ‘Newbie’, wasn’t surprise when the phone rang. The voice on the other end shock her-Brett’s landlord.

“Newbie, according to his family, if we want to question Brett his psychology counselor has to be present,” Special Agent Jack Kimer exclaimed, as he pushed away from his desk. “I’m heading for the NCO Club for dinner. You want to come?”

Emily shook her head, at the empty invitation. “I’ll pick up something later.”

Patiently, she waited to hear the outer door to close, then secretly exited out the back.

Darkness had settled over Bozeman when Emily got to the apartment. The door, partially open, worried her. Stepping into the living room, the smell of death overtook her.

Lights from the street illuminated the scene before her. An icy chill swept over her when she saw, in a chair, the corpse.

GRAVE COUNSELOR

By Lynn Marie Steinmayer

I awoke with a start in my old bedroom that felt like the ice hotel. I grabbed my bathrobe and tried to turn the light on to dispel the dark but the scene was worse than I thought. Clicking the lamp didn't help, the bone chilling cold and dark were permanent. I swiped my feet around the floor feeling for my slippers. I was house-sitting my family home and after tripping on what I think were my father's secret heels, I got to the kitchen. What a surprise, to enter the kitchen and find the flashlight only to discover that the phone was deader than the corpse of my landlord. The door smashed open with a huge wooden club. "Oh dang" I thought, like a fool, when I turned to see the ice pick coming towards me in the hands of a very living trollop.

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FLIGHT PATTERN

By Heather Pemberton

Katherine kicked off her heels and stared around the dark kitchen. *Where was he?*

She scrolled her text messages.

“Hi honey my flight’s been...” It cut off.

Damn. Ian’s flight must have been delayed. So much for their romantic dinner. It was the marriage counselor’s idea. As if their marriage wasn’t a dead end. Could they really start a family after his secret affair?

Katherine tried Ian’s cell and listened to the crickets outside. No answer.

She searched the Delta site. His flight wasn’t delayed; it had been rescheduled to an *earlier* time. If he was at the club, she was going to give him living hell.

She walked towards the bedroom, punching his number again as the crickets grew louder.

Inside, Ian’s cell phone lay chirping on the floor - next to his bloodied corpse. But instead of grief, Katherine felt a dim, rushing memory.

She’d held the knife.

NORMAN'S SKELETONS

By Gloria Alden

Norman, my husband, considers himself a naturalist. Half our basement is like a museum. The stuffed animals are weird enough, but the skeletons are creepy. He doesn't kill living animals, but picks up dead ones along the road – cats, dogs, anything. He even has a family of raccoons.

The worse part is boiling the skinned carcasses to get meat off the bones. A fresh kill isn't so bad, but it's the ones aged a few days that are totally gross.

After the years I've put up with his disgusting hobby, he had to be a fool to think I'd tolerate another woman, too. So when I surprised him in our bedroom with a trollop, I did what I had to do using a lamp as a club. Now there's a new skeleton hanging in our basement. Of course, that means Norman has to keep his museum a secret now.

POTTER'S GREED

By Gloria Courmoyer

Nutritional Counselor Ashley Foolgrave walked out of her high-rise apartment near a health club. She was surprised to find her ex-lover and landlord Brandon "Icepick" Merriweather on the sidewalk. A dark red stain oozed from under his body. Worse yet, he looked dead. Knowing she shouldn't disturb the scene, she approached the corpse. He was barefoot; his skinny legs sprawled at odd angles. She picked up a shoe then looked at his feet. The bones of both heels were broken suggesting a fall from a high place. She looked up. Curtains billowed out of a sixth story window that Ashley knew well: Icepick's bedroom. Kayla Mercer's smirking face looked down at her.

Kayla, an impoverished potter, was Icepick's only living family member. He had told Ashley secretly that Kayla was his sole beneficiary.

"The trollop pushed him," she thought. "But proving it may be stickier than mud wrestling in clay."

THE PUPPETEER'S WRATH

By Benjamin Resendes

The scene smelt of death. The putrid, unmistakable, stench of rotting corpses lingered in the house. Outside I could hear the sound of the patrolman who found the family; he was still vomiting. The bedroom was dark, only lit by the small glints of moonlight seeping through the closed curtains; protocol was to leave everything as found until someone like me showed up. I hesitated before flicking on the overhead lights. Never in my tenure had I seen something as surprising, or worse than what lay in front of me. The family was strung up to the fan; slowly rotating, but that's not what shocked me. What looked like the father, was from the waist down, skinned to the bone. His heels scraped the floor as the fan twisted round. The children's faces were peaceful, as though they had a secret to hide. Hades couldn't describe what I was witnessing.

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APPARITION

By Rick Halpern

The patriarch had died in his luxurious bedroom, a carving knife to his heart, a gruesome scene discovered by his landlord.

Days later, the crime still unsolved, the entire family gathered at the cemetery, except for Joseph, the bastard son, always the fool, presumed dead himself, or leading a secret life somewhere, or worse, living with some trollop under cover of dark.

All had had their bone to pick with Joseph, and years ago had shown him their heels, excluding him from their exclusive club, unsympathetic to the severe psychoses he suffered which the counselor had warned could reemerge in later life if not attended to soon.

Then, to everyone's surprise, as the corpse was being lowered, Joseph appeared graveside like an apparition. The family gawked in horror. He flashed an ice-cube tray smile, languidly examined his kin, and mused loud enough for all to hear...

"I wonder who's next?"

AFTER HOUR PARTY

By Joel Dossi

What a fool I was.

I met him at the club. Dark hair. Muscular body. I feared he thought of me as a trollop, making the scene as obvious as a trashy novel. He invited me home and anticipation rushed through my bones.

His living room was decked out for a party. Food. Liquor. Even drugs. He even chipped away at a block of ice for our drinks. Then he eyed the bedroom and I smiled.

He handed me the drink. Imagining his strong hands caressing my body, I closed my eyes. But I opened them when I felt cold steel on my cheek. Then I saw the sharp end of his pick nearly pricking my skin.

“Surprised?” he asked. “Or just scared?”

“Worse,” I replied, because now I knew he didn’t think of me as a trollop. He thought of me as dead.

‘NOBODY’S FOOL’

By Sandra Lee

“A trollop is she.” the counselor said of his young and lovely bride.

A bone, he'd surely pick with her about a secret she did hide.

At a club in her slinky dress and heels she'd party to the bone.
She was living it up while he, a family man sat home alone.

What's worse? She had embarrassed him. For that, he'd take her life.

He had a big surprise in store for his disobedient wife.

Inside the dark bedroom he waited; he staged the scene of his crime.

“She'll be dead in minutes.” he mused. “The secret will be mine.”

For the corpse of a monster with veins of ice no shallow grave would do.

“The landlord will unearth you.” he thought. “I'll have a talking-to.”

So through the window she crashed before she fell into the pool.

The counselor's pick was a loser but he was nobody's fool!

