

EXCERPT FROM

## Trouble at High Tide

A MURDER, SHE WROTE MYSTERY

*Jessica Fletcher is in Bermuda for much-needed rest and relaxation. She's staying in a charming cottage near the home of her host Judge Thomas Betterton, who lives on the island occasionally with his stepchildren and niece. Jessica is looking forward to a quiet vacation, but unexpectedly finds herself in the center of an investigation when a murderer mimics the crimes of the infamous Jack the Ripper.*

He was ahead of me in line. A stocky man with thin red hair parted on the side and muttonchop sideburns that reached up his cheek to connect to a bushy mustache. He wore a heavy brown tweed suit, carried a book under one arm, and toted an old leather valise held closed by straps across the top. He was the image of a late-nineteenth-century traveler—and a strange sight to see as we inched our way forward toward the twenty-first-century customs agent in Bermuda.

“Have your passport and other papers out and ready, please,” an officer called to the crowd. The man in front of me set down his suitcase and groped around in his jacket for his papers, dropping his book in the process. I scooped it up and, startled, looked into the bleary eyes of the book's owner. Part of the title was spelled out in large red letters dripping with blood: *Jack the Ripper*. The man mumbled his thanks, and quickly turned his back to me.

“Next! Step lively, sir. We don't want to keep all these people waiting.”

“Odd-looking chap,” a man behind me murmured to his wife as the redheaded man moved forward to the podium where the customs agent waited.

“He must be an actor, doncha think?” she responded. “Who else would dress that way?”

Fifteen minutes later, I was riding in the rear of a limousine making its way from L.C. Wade International Airport through St. George's Parish. I pulled a copy of the local newspaper out of the seat-back pocket in front of me. The headlines trumpeted the appointment of a new deputy chairman of the United Bermuda Party; the health minister's call for blood donors to meet the dire need; and an extension of the school lunch program to include breakfast for children whose nutritional needs were not being met in their home lives. In a box at the bottom of the front

page, an article bemoaned the lack of progress made in finding and arresting a serial killer. The body of a woman from the Dominican Republic had been discovered only a week ago in an alley behind the Hotel Rampling in Hamilton. Her throat had been slit. It was the third such death in two months, sending shock waves through the population. While Bermuda's rising crime rate was of grave concern to the island's sixty-five thousand residents, in the past, killings had been either drug or gang-related. The current victims—all recent immigrants—seemed to lack those connections, although their murders were characterized by other, more disturbing similarities.

All three bore striking parallels to the infamous "Jack the Ripper" killings in London's impoverished Whitechapel district in the 1880s and '90s. As with the Ripper cases, all three women had been prostitutes. All had had their throats slashed, and the bodies of the three victims had been mutilated.

I'd heard about the Bermuda crimes at home, of course. Anything sensational gets immediate coverage on the Internet, and disappears just as quickly. Big-city newspapers had taken note of the killings, and television networks made brief mention of them, though I doubted they'd sent a team of reporters to the scene. Had the victims been American tourists, it would have been an altogether different situation. In any case, that was not why I was in Bermuda.

In the article, police dismissed the Ripper analogies, assured the public that the streets were safe, and speculated that this latest victim may have been killed by a client. However, when the article jumped to the back page, additional complications were revealed. The police commissioner was quoted complaining that "international coverage of the crimes has sparked some unfortunate tourism." It seems ghoulish visitors captivated by the macabre murders—"ripperologists" they called themselves—had arrived on the island and were conducting ad-hoc investigations, which were hampering official police activities. My mind immediately flashed to the man at the airport. Was he another one of these ghoulish visitors, a Jack the Ripper "fan" so to speak, hastening to the scene of similar crimes?

The article also disclosed that police were contending with a raft of false leads. As had occurred in London at the time of the original Jack the Ripper killings, public fascination with

the crimes had inspired a number of fabricated “tips” that authorities were nevertheless obligated to track down. The commissioner promised swift convictions of anyone found to impede police business.

“Here on vacation?” my driver asked as I put down the newspaper.

My eyes met his in the rearview mirror. “Yes,” I said, taking a deep breath. “I’m planning just to sit on the beach, watch the breakers come rolling in, and catch up with my reading.”

“You’ll be a bit busier than that, if the judge has anything to do with it.”

“Oh? I hadn’t known he’d be here.”

My host, Thomas Betterton, was a federal judge from New Jersey who had written a controversial book on reforming the federal court system. I had been introduced to him by my publisher Vaughan Buckley, and we had met again when we’d sat together on several book-and-author panels over the past year.

“If you’re ever in need of some R-and-R, come down and stay at my place in Bermuda,” he’d said the last time I’d seen him. “I’ve got a boat, a couple of cottages right on the beach. You can have one all to yourself—even if I’m not there. And if I am there, you don’t have to feel obligated to spend time with me in the main house. You can come and go as you please.”

“That’s a very generous offer,” I’d said. “Be careful or I might take you up on it.”

“I want you to. They’re just sitting there gathering dust. But I’ll have my man, Adam, clean one up for you. How’s next month?”

He must have caught me at a particularly vulnerable time. I was weary from traveling across the country on a book tour, and the prospect of staying in a private cottage on a beautiful sunny island was appealing. I’d been to Bermuda before and fallen in love with its pastel homes, pristine pink beaches, turquoise waters, and the genteel manners of the people. I don’t remember agreeing to go, but the following week a package arrived. I took it to my desk, slit open the padded envelope, and drew out a pink cap with “Tommy’s Tucker’s Town” embroidered in script above the brim. I held up the hat and a set of keys fell into my lap. A note attached to the keys read: “Jessica, it’s yours for the whole week. Just call this number and let Adam Wyse know when your flight comes in. Catch you another time. Busy season for me.

Have fun! Tom B.”

I’d looked out my window at the gray skies and pouring rain that had engulfed Cabot Cove and picked up the phone.

I pressed the button to roll down the window and leaned over to feel the warm Bermuda breeze on my face. We were on the road between Harrington Sound and Castle Harbour, the deep blue of one a contrast to the more turquoise waters of the other. Just breathing the salt-tinged air filled me with contentment.

“Yup, he likes to entertain, the judge does. Tonight, he’s hosting another one of his ‘intimate soirees.’ That’s what he calls them,” Adam, the driver, said as he maneuvered the town car past a jitney filled with tourists taking pictures of the view. “I think the party’s in your honor. He invited all the biggies, and I overheard him brag about you coming to stay.”

*Well, it’s only for one night, I thought. I can be a gracious guest for one night and meet the judge’s friends. Then I’ll make my excuses and hide away in the cottage.*

“He’s got a couple staying at the other beach house, the one next to yours, and the guest rooms in the main house are full. I’ve been hauling cases of wine around all week, and Norlene, that’s the cook, had to hire an extra assistant to help prepare the meals.”

*Oh dear,* I thought. I could see my peaceful island escape slipping away. “I don’t think I packed appropriately for this,” I said aloud, mentally calculating what I’d brought that could serve as party clothes.

“Yup, the judge likes lots of action.”

“Have you worked for Judge Betterton for very long?” I asked.

“Only about six months. I was between jobs and my cousin knew his cousin and recommended me. I’m his first PA—that’s a personal assistant. He never had one before, so I don’t know how long I’ll be working for him. But I only sign on for a short period of time anyway, no more than a year. I like to keep my options open.”

“I haven’t met many personal assistants,” I said. “What keeps you most busy?”

“You basically do whatever your boss needs you to do. I go where he goes. Sometimes I drive, like today, escort people around. Other times I’m running into town to pick up something

at a store for him or one of the family. In Bermuda, residents are only allowed one car per household, so a lot of what I do is chauffeuring. But I also answer the phone, pick up the mail, take the guests out fishing on the judge's boat. It varies, but I like to travel. I get to meet some interesting people and see different parts of the world."

"It sounds exciting, but I imagine it can be very difficult, too. How many people have you been a personal assistant for?" I asked.

"The judge is my fifth. And it's true, sometimes you get people who take advantage or don't treat you nicely. They're really looking for a slave, not a PA. I worked for one rich guy who kept snapping his fingers at me. 'Adam, get me a bottle of water.' 'Adam, I left my pipe upstairs.'" He snapped his fingers to illustrate. "'Adam, the dog made a mess on the carpet.'"

"Doesn't sound like a pleasant job or a pleasant person to work for."

"Don't get me wrong. I don't mind any reasonable request. That's what I'm there for. But this guy, he never learned the words 'please' or 'thank you.' Just—" He snapped his fingers again. "I was out of there in a month."

"I don't blame you," I said.

"Now, the judge, because he never had a PA before, he's not always sure what to do with me. I'm kind of teaching him as I go along."

I laughed. "Why would he need a PA?" I asked.

"Actually, he had this law clerk, Barry Lovick, working for him before, but he told me he likes to do his own research and I figured out he likes to keep his papers private. Apparently this guy Lovick was copying files and taking them home. At least that's what I hear."

"I wonder why," I said.

"Beats me. I never did get all that legal mumbo jumbo. I even had trouble understanding the lease when I had an apartment in New York. All that party of the first part stuff leaves me cold."

As Adam drove inland, the landscape changed to expanses of green lawns and trees and occasional glimpses of lush gardens through gates. We passed several communities where the homes were clustered together, and Adam wove in and out of small roads before the water came into view again and he turned onto Tucker's Town Road. He made a right at the crest of a

hill into the brick driveway of an elegant yellow stucco house and pulled up to the entrance under a *porte cochere* supported by white columns carved to resemble palm trees. He hopped out and came around to assist me exiting the car. Large pots of frangipani on either side of the Palladian door perfumed the air.

The house was situated on a bluff that overlooked the harbor across the road, and the ocean in the back. Adam opened the door into the breezeway and deposited my rolling bag on the tile floor. I could see through to the rear of the house and beyond it to an expanse of blue water.

"The cottage is around to the back and down a path to the beach," Adam said. "I'll bring your luggage there in a while, but the judge wanted you to join the family for lunch before you settle in. Okay?"

"Certainly," I said. "I'd like to thank him for the opportunity to stay in such a lovely place."

"The beach houses don't hold a candle to the guest rooms up here, but they're comfortable and pretty private. I stayed in one until I got booted out to make room for the couple who arrived yesterday. Now I'm in a room off the kitchen. But I'm flexible. You have to be if you're a PA."

He led me through a large living room furnished almost entirely in white, including an ivory grand piano in one corner and a fireplace in another. Groupings of plush sofas in bleached canvas and bone-colored upholstered chairs, punctuated by a few bright pillows, created an inviting environment. The pale palette called attention to the spectacular view of the deep blue ocean with waves spilling onto a sparkling beach. A young woman with a book, her face obscured by her long blond hair, was curled up in a tan-and-white checked armchair by a broad window. Next to her was a telescope aimed at the pink sand. She didn't look up from her reading as we crossed the room, nor did Adam acknowledge her, which I thought was strange. Perhaps he didn't notice her, I silently rationalized.

"Well, well, our star has finally arrived," Tom Betterton boomed out from his place at the head of the table when Adam escorted me into the dining room. Two others were already seated with my host. They looked to be in their late twenties.

"Please don't get up," I said. "I'm sorry I'm interrupting your meal."

"Nonsense," Tom said, hauling himself up from his chair. "We've been eagerly awaiting

you. Norlene has your plate in the warmer." He paused on his way to greet me, plucked a bell from the sideboard, and gave it an energetic ring. "Good to see you again," he said, enveloping me in a bear hug before I could step back. "Here, here, sit down." He held out the seat opposite his at the end of the table. "I was just telling these children about the last time I was in Washington visiting the White House. Every American should see that magnificent building."

"Did you get to sleep in the Lincoln bedroom?" the younger man asked archly. He winked at the woman across the table from him.

Tom ignored the comment. "I imagine you've been to the White House many times, haven't you, Jessica?" he said to me as he pushed in my chair.

"Well, I've taken the visitors' tour," I said, looking up.

"Spectacular place, isn't it?" He returned to his seat, pausing only to ring the bell on the sideboard again. He sat heavily and raised his eyebrows at me. "Hope you like fish chowder."

"Love it," I said.

"Adam caught some of the fish our cook used," Tom said. "A real jack-of-all-trades." He picked up his napkin and waved it at the young woman to his left. "My daughter, Madeline Betterton."

"Stepdaughter," the young man corrected as Madeline leaned over to offer me her hand.

"Adopted daughter," Madeline said. "My mother was wife number one."

"Her sarcastic brother, Stephen," Tom said, cocking his head at the fellow in question.

Stephen rose slightly from his seat and gave a short bow in my direction. "A pleasure, Mrs. Fletcher. We're desperately hoping you can enliven the conversation. We've had this verbal tour of the U.S. capital one too many times."

"And no talk about Sagamore Hill either," Madeline said with a fake shudder. "We've heard enough about Teddy Roosevelt's home to last a lifetime."

It was no surprise to me that Judge Thomas Betterton spent considerable time in the nation's capital and enjoyed discussing his visits there. Although he sat on the bench in New Jersey, he had numerous connections in Washington, the most noteworthy of them the president of the United States, who'd been Betterton's law school classmate years earlier.

"Where's Alicia?" the judge asked as Adam pulled out a chair next to me, preparing to take

his place at the table.

"I believe I saw her in the living room reading, Your Honor," Adam replied.

"Always has her head in a book, that one," Tom said, smiling at me. "Well, go get her," he instructed Adam. "She'll want to meet our honored guest. Besides, she hasn't eaten yet."

Adam did as directed and returned shortly with the very pretty girl with long, wavy blond hair who'd been reading when I arrived. I estimated her to be in her late teens to early twenties. He pulled out a chair for her next to Stephen, who continued eating without acknowledging her presence.

"Alicia has been so excited about you coming here," Tom said to me. "She's a writer, too. Say hello to Mrs. Fletcher, Allie. She's the famous author I was telling you about. Alicia is my niece, Jessica."

"Yes. The favorite child," Madeline said.

Alicia batted her eyelashes at me and smiled prettily. "So glad you could come," she said.

"It was very kind of your uncle to invite me."

Our introduction was interrupted by the entrance of the cook carrying a huge silver tray.

"Ah," the judge said, grinning. "You're in for a treat now. Norlene is the finest cook on the island."

Adam raced to Norlene's side, relieved her of her burden, and set the tray down on a built-in sideboard under a stucco arch. The cook wiped her hands on her apron and picked up two bowls, setting one in front of me and the other at Alicia's place. Adam took a third bowl for himself.

"It's fish chowder," Norlene announced. "Should still be good. I've been holding it a while." She slipped a basket of rolls between my place and Alicia's.

"I'm sure it will be wonderful," I said, picking up my spoon and tasting the spicy stew of mixed fish and vegetables in what looked like a tomato-beef broth.

Without being asked, Stephen set a bottle with a black label next to Alicia. "Hot sauce for the hotshot?" he said.

"I thought you were supposed to be on your best behavior today," Alicia said, taking off the bottle cap and shaking several drops into her bowl.

"No. That's your department."

"I'll have some of that," Adam said, reaching for the bottle. "Mrs. Fletcher? Would you like to try it? It's an island specialty."

"No thanks, this is hot enough for me," I said. "It certainly has an unusual flavor."

"That's probably the rum," Adam said. "Takes a bit of getting used to."

"Oh," I said, helping myself to a roll. I hoped that Norlene had cooked some of the alcohol out of her stew, but if she hadn't, I wanted some bread to soften the blow.

While the three of us ate, Tom, Madeline, and Stephen discussed the guest list for the party. A number of notables were expected, including a local judge, the commissioner of police, and the owner of an art gallery in St. George's. The menu was also analyzed. When the conversation drifted to the relative merits of Bermudian versus Jamaican rums, I leaned over to Alicia, who had been silently concentrating on her soup.

"Your uncle said you like to write. What kind of writing do you do?"

She shrugged. "All kinds, I guess. I had to do a lot of writing for school."

"You don't have a favorite genre? Poetry? Stories? Essays?"

She shrugged again.

*So much for her excitement at my arrival.* I tried a different tack. "I noticed you were reading when I came in," I said. "What kinds of books do you like?"

She gave me a strange smile. "Mysteries mostly. True crime, the more bloodthirsty the better."

"And what are you reading now?"

She reached into the pocket of her sweater, slipped a book on the table, and withdrew it just as quickly, but not before I'd had time to read the title: *The Crimes of Jack the Ripper*.