

EXCERPT FROM

## **Murder in a Minor Key**

A MURDER, SHE WROTE MYSTERY

*Days before leaving to visit New Orleans (pre-Katrina) for a book conference, Jessica Fletcher and Cabot Cove Sheriff Mort Metzger shoot the breeze while fishing off the town dock. Here is the complete Chapter One of Murder in a Minor Key.*

“Hand me the bait pail, Mrs. F. I think they nibbled off my worm again.”

I put down the national section of the *Bangor Times* and passed a tin bucket of night crawlers to Cabot Cove’s sheriff, Mort Metzger.

It was Sunday afternoon, and we were sitting on the end of the Town Dock dangling our fishing lines in the harbor, but not getting much interest on the part of the marine population. A recent bout of rainstorms had left every garden in Cabot Cove soggy, and Mort’s wife Maureen had complained that the worms were taking over her flower beds. Mort’s answer had been to dig up a load of the grayish-pink, wriggly creatures and invite me to fish with him while we brainstormed who we could get to help finance the purchase of a new patrol car for the village police force.

“The Ladies Auxiliary likes to have a pet project for their Spring Fling,” I suggested.

“Now, Mrs. F,” Mort said, hesitating as he baited his hook and dropped it in the water, “I don’t want to turn politically incorrect on you, and I appreciate all the ladies have done for the village. But buying a police cruiser with the proceeds from a fashion show somehow just doesn’t seem right.”

"I'm disappointed in you, Mort. The whole object is to raise the money. As long as the gathering of those funds is legal and proper, whether they come from a fashion show or a pancake breakfast is not all that important."

Mort's pained expression said he wanted to disagree, but thought better of it. He picked up the newspaper I'd abandoned, and idly turned the pages.

"Have you talked to the Men's Club, or the Lions or the Rotary?" I asked.

"They've already budgeted their funds for the year. Ralph Mackin needs a new roof on the old courthouse, and he got to the Rotary first. And the high school Key Club is committed to their baby carseat program for the hospital. I can't think of anyone else, can you?"

"Then it's got to be the Ladies Auxiliary, Mort. And I think we'd better approach them pretty soon, before they commit all their money, too. It's either that or wait till next year."

"We can't. The state's matching funds program is only for this year. If we miss that, we'll never be able to replace that old heap we've got."

"Is it in that bad shape?"

"It's pretty beat up. One of the deputies had to go to Tommy Brinkley's home to give him a speeding ticket because the patrol car couldn't keep up. And Tommy's old clunker is no sports car; it's a 1987 station wagon."

"I'll talk to Tina Treyz on Monday," I said. "She's a terrific fundraiser, and she's on the organizing committee for the ladies' luncheon."

"Well, she's a driver all right," Mort said, warming to the idea. "If anyone can get us to the goal, she's it."

We sat quietly for awhile, Mort bouncing his line and reading the paper.

I breathed in the fresh, spring air. The sky was full of mares' tails, the high cirrus clouds, a sure sign of impending rain, but it was perfect Maine April

weather, crisp and bright, occasionally warm enough in the sun to take off your sweater, and chilly enough at night to keep two blankets on the end of the bed.

“Say, aren’t you going down to New Orleans next week?” he asked.

“Yes. Why?”

“Take a look here. Got a strange murder there, it says.”

I leaned over Mort’s shoulder and read along with him.

**AP – New Orleans police are investigating the possible connection between voodoo practices and an apparent murder that took place yesterday in the Crescent City, as the Louisiana metropolis is also known. The body of Elijah Williams was found sitting up against the tomb of 19<sup>th</sup> Century voodoo queen Marie Laveau in the city’s oldest graveyard, St. Louis Cemetery Number One. Police said the victim appeared to have been strangled, but declined to elaborate further. An autopsy is pending.**

**Laveau’s tomb is a popular attraction in this Mississippi River city, where swamp conditions forced citizens to “bury” their dead in above-ground vaults for over two centuries. The cemeteries, known as Cities of the Dead, are regular stops on sightseeing tours, but the two St. Louis Cemeteries are located in what are now considered dangerous neighborhoods, and visitors are warned not to wander from the safety of their tour groups.**

**Mayor Maurice Amador reassured the public there was no cause to be alarmed, and announced that a special security detail would be assigned to the cemetery for the next month. However, merchants in the French Quarter complained that the mayor’s office was not doing enough to safeguard the tourism industry.**

**Police said Williams, whose age was not known, was, at one time, a guide in the bayous. He disappeared fifteen years ago on a fishing trip**

during which a prominent politician died. The politician's badly mauled body had been recovered from the alligator infested waters. An NOPD spokesman said Williams had been presumed dead as well, and the discovery of his body on Saturday was a surprise. An investigation is under way to uncover Williams' whereabouts for the last decade and a half, the spokesman said, and the NOPD was calling on local residents to come forward with any information pertinent to the case.

"Hmmm, interesting story."

"Now, Mrs. F., you be careful down there. I hear that New Orleans is a dangerous city."

"You have to take the same precautions you would in any large city, Mort, and I always do. I had no problems when I was there last year, and I'm looking forward to seeing all the things I missed on the first visit. And, yes, I'll be careful."

He harrumphed.

A slight tug on my line returned my attention to fishing.

"I think I may have caught something," I said gleefully.

Mort eyed the slight curve at the top of my pole.

"More likely you've hooked a weed," he said. "Whatever it is isn't giving you much of a fight."

I quickly reeled in the slack in my line and pulled back on the rod. When the end of the fishing line cleared the water, hanging from the hook was a tiny fish, no more than five inches long.

"Got a dab there. Definitely not a keeper," Mort said, deftly netting my catch.

Apologizing to the little flounder, I gently extracted the hook from its mouth and leaned over the edge of the dock to release it back into the water. The fish hesitated a moment and then flapped away, back down to the bottom of the bay. I wondered if the experience would change the life of that little fish. Would it shun temptation from now on? Would it approach an easy meal with suspicion? Or would it forget to be cautious, only to be caught another day?