

A Barbara Holloway Mystery

# DEFENSE for the DEVIL



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Kate Wilhelm

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# DEFENSE FOR THE DEVIL

A BARBARA HOLLOWAY MYSTERY

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# MITCH

## 1

*EDDIE CARRIES, YOU handle the paperwork. Have a shower, eat something, relax, just be sure to call this number exactly at one.*

Using the name on the credit card and driver's license—R. M. Palmer—Mitch signed for two steaks, fries, beer. He ate his steak with a towel wrapped around him, his hair dripping. At one he made the call. "Mitch," he said. "We're here." *Here* was Miami, not even the beach, just Miami.

"Let me speak to Eddie for a second."

He handed over the phone. Eddie's end of the conversation was a series of grunts. Eddie was six feet three, and nearly that broad, with a brain that would have left empty space in a peanut shell. Eddie handed the phone back to him.

"Her plane gets in at four, Swiss Air from Zurich. Let her make

the first move. If she doesn't, return to the motel and call this number at seven. You remember the rest of it?"

"Sure," Mitch said.

"Good. I'll be waiting to hear from you."

After he hung up, Mitch pulled the spread off one of the beds and lay down. "We'll head out at two-thirty," he said. "I'm going to snooze." Eddie grunted, watching a ball game on TV. When he got up to go to the john, he took the suitcase with him; when he sprawled again, he kept it at his side. It looked like an ordinary twenty-six-inch suitcase, except for the keypad lock. The first time Mitch and Eddie had done this, Palmer had said, "Pick a number, Mitch, see if you're lucky." When he touched the keypad, a little red light had come on. "Message is, don't touch," Palmer had said. His was the scariest voice Mitch had ever heard.

The problem with Eddie was that he slept like a cat, dead out one minute, wide awake the next. He had gotten plenty of sleep while Mitch drove from New York. Mitch had slept little when they switched places, and he felt sore now, but the adrenaline was pumping; he was primed.

At two he got up and took his duffel bag into the bathroom. He brushed his teeth and then took out a length of weighted pipe and a six-inch-long leather holder that slid over the end. He swung it, nodded, and kept it in his hand under the towel when he went back to the bedroom. He moved around a lot; he went to the window, checking out the sun, grabbed his slacks from a chair and shook them. Eddie scowled and hunched lower, closer to the television. When Mitch began to whistle, Eddie reached over to turn up the volume. Mitch swung the pipe hard, catching him in the temple.

Eddie went down to his hands and knees, and Mitch hit him again, harder, and then again. Eddie slumped to the floor.

When Mitch left at two-thirty, he hung the DO NOT DISTURB card on the door, and he carried his duffel bag and the black suitcase.

*Park the car and go in together. Buy a red rose and slip it under the strap on the suitcase, then go to the customs section and wait. Don't stay too close together, just keep each other in sight. Give it time, there might be a delay in customs; but if no one approaches by*

*five-thirty, go back to the motel.*

He arrived at Miami International at three-twenty, and by a quarter to four he was near customs, waiting, with what seemed to be a million other people. All he knew was that it was a woman this time.

She was short and plump, forty maybe, expensively dressed in a beige silk jacket and skirt, carrying a big shoulder bag and a briefcase. She looked around anxiously—amateur—then spotted the suitcase with the rose and walked toward him.

“Eddie?” He nodded.

“I thought there would be two of you.”

“He’s over there,” Mitch said, nodding toward a man leaning against a post.

She reached for the suitcase tentatively; he moved it back. “We have to make a phone call first,” he said.

“Oh, of course.”

He led the way to a bank of telephones. She looked alarmed when the man leaning against the post left it and walked away in the opposite direction and was lost among the hordes in people. “Don’t worry about him,” Mitch said. “He’ll keep us in sight.” He used the phone card and punched in numbers. The telephone rang once at the other end. He made a grunting noise. No one expected Eddie to talk much on the phone.

“No problems?”

“No.”

“Let me speak to her.”

He handed the phone to the woman. She listened a second, then after a quick glance at the suitcase, she said, “No problems. They’re here. Everything is well.” After another pause, she said, lowering her voice, “Of course. Penelope. Wait a second.” She fumbled in her shoulder bag, found a notebook and a slim gold pen, and jotted down something. Then she handed the phone back to Mitch.

He listened to the instructions he already had memorized, and the line went dead. He continued to hold the phone to his ear. “Yes,” he said. “Sure. Right.” He nodded, listening to a dead line, then hung up.

“Change of plans,” he said. “I’ve got to drive you to a hotel. He’s

afraid for you to drive back alone. You've read the stories about carjacks along that route?" He looked around, as if searching for his partner. "Wait here. Don't move a step. Be right back." He strode off, carrying the suitcase. The area was packed with arrivals, piles of luggage, people milling about. He mingled a minute or two, then returned to her. "All set," he said. "Let's go."

Her anxiety had returned. She eyed the suitcase, gave him an appraising look, then glanced around for the other man.

"Look," he said irritably, "I don't like this any more than you do. You don't have to register at the hotel. Once we get there, I hand over the suitcase and the car title and keys, you give me the briefcase, and you're on your own." He looked past her into the crowd, nodded, as if to his partner, then said, "Let's move. I've got to be back here in time to catch another plane. My partner will keep us in sight until we get to the car. And we'll both hope and pray I get back in time to make the flight. Let's move."

"He should have told me," she said.

"Yeah, but he didn't. Now, are you coming or not? Lady, I don't give a fuck one way or the other." She looked at the suitcase. When he started to walk, she did, too.

*As soon as Eddie makes the transfer, he'll take her to the car, give her the title and keys, and you're done with her. While he's doing that, you pick up your tickets at the Delta counter. Someone will meet your plane at La Guardia.* Right.

The car was a black two-door Lexus. The sight of it seemed to cheer her up a little. He tossed the suitcase into the back, but she kept her bag and the briefcase with her. The lead pipe was under the driver's seat. Traffic was fierce. It was five-fifteen, rush hour.

When he exited the freeway, she seemed unaware that they were nowhere near downtown yet; her alarm didn't go off until he turned onto a mean little side street. She clutched the briefcase harder. After another minute or two, she asked hoarsely, "Where are we going?"

"Not far," he said, making another turn. There was little traffic in this section of the city; a hurricane had hit hard a year before, few repairs had been made and a lot of the buildings were uninhabitable, but he knew people were watching the expensive car.

This part had to go fast. He pulled into an abandoned convenience-store parking lot and stopped. She was trying futilely to open her door when he hit her with the lead pipe. It was a backhanded blow without much room for the swing, even with his seat all the way back, but it was a heavy pipe, and his arm was strong. Carefully he pulled the briefcase from her limp hands, then he grabbed her bag and riffled through it swiftly, searching for every scrap of paper, her airline ticket folder, receipts.... He took out the notebook and her wallet. He pulled out a couple hundred-dollar bills and the smaller ones and dropped them back into the bag loose, kept the wallet. Then he undid her seat belt, released the lock, opened the door and pushed her out, tossed her bag out after her. Let the local greaseballs have a few bucks to play with; by the time someone got around to calling the cops, there'd be nothing to find but another unidentified stiff, and nobody would have seen anything.

Hours later when he gassed up, he jotted down the name she had said on the telephone: Penelope. He searched through the notebook for the message she had written and found it near the end, the code for the suitcase lock.

“Message is, don't touch,” he said.

## MAGGIE

IT WAS FOUR in the afternoon, muggy outside, and Barbara Holloway had been rushing for an hour and a half by the time she rang the bell at Martin's restaurant. He was closed at this time of day, she knew, and probably he was busy doing prep in the kitchen, but he opened the door almost instantly. He was so big that seeing him in an open doorway was always something of a jolt; he seemed to fill the entire space. And he was so black that the glare of his white beret was blinding and appeared to her sun-dazed eyes to be floating. He couldn't wear a chef's high hat, he had explained a long time ago, because ducking all the time killed his back.

"Is she here yet?"

He shook his head. "Look at you, dripping wet. You been running races or something?"

"Or something. I got two luscious salmon steaks, and lettuce and spinach for a salad. I washed it and have it in the fridge. And little red potatoes. Is that enough? Oh, and green beans."

"Sounds like plenty. You want some lemonade or iced tea? We're having iced tea."

"That would be wonderful." She sat at her usual table and pulled a cookbook from her briefcase. "Salmon is easy, isn't it? And quick?" She glanced up at him as he was entering the kitchen; she could see that his shoulders were shaking with laughter. The problem was, she thought glumly, that people who knew how to do things had no sympathy for people who didn't. And she didn't know how to cook.

She should have been out of here by three with the whole afternoon ahead of her, plenty of time to think, to plan, to try things and toss them if they didn't work out. But at two or a little later a frantic woman had called and begged for an appointment, now, today, as soon as she could drive over from the coast. And she, Barbara, had agreed.

She and John had explained to her father at dinner on Saturday night the arrangement they had come up with. "What we'll do is take alternate days, John one day, me the next. Then over here on Saturday, as long as your invitation is still good, and a restaurant one night a week."

Frank had turned to John, who nodded and said, "I have six

dishes that are incomparable. Two weeks before I have to repeat.”

Barbara had not missed the amusement in her father’s eyes. He knew as well as she did that she had three dishes in her repertoire: steak and baked potatoes, canned soup, and frozen entrées.

Anyone can cook, she told herself frequently, anyone who can read a recipe and understand the directions and follow them without fail. Of the three necessary skills, she was very good at one. She was reading more than she wanted to know about salmon when Martin brought out iced tea. A fat fish? Rolls of fat around the waist? What waist?

“Salmon’s easy,” Martin said without a smile. “You going to put a sauce on it? It’s good without sauce,” he added quickly, “just a squeeze of lemon juice, a little butter.”

It needed a sauce, she understood, with a feeling of desperation, remembering the one time she had tried white sauce and it had come out with little gooey lumps like hard library paste.

The doorbell rang and he turned to go answer it.

She shoved the cookbook back inside her briefcase and watched as he admitted a man and woman, both dressed in jeans and T-shirts and running shoes, exactly the way Barbara was dressed. The woman was carrying an oversized tote bag with a picture of a whale. She was thirty-something, he a little younger. Both good-looking, fit.

“Thank you for seeing me on such short notice,” the woman said. “I’m Maggie Folsum.” She held out her hand. “And this is Laurence Thielman.”

“Barbara Holloway,” Barbara said, shaking hands with her first, then with him.

“Laurence will wait out in the car,” Maggie Folsum said. “He just wanted to make sure everything was okay first.”

“Too hot out there,” Barbara said. “You could hang out in a booth.”

Laurence Thielman looked at Maggie. She glanced back at the booths, then nodded.

“You folks want some iced tea? Coffee? Coke or something?” Martin asked.

They both said iced tea and he went back to the kitchen.

Laurence settled himself in the most distant booth, not very far away in this small restaurant, but out of hearing.

Not hysterical, Barbara decided, studying Maggie Folsom, but either exhausted or ill. She had deep shadows under her eyes, and the drawn appearance that came with sleeplessness. About as tall as Barbara, slender and muscular, with long dark hair pulled back on her neck loosely with a ribbon. No makeup. Her eyes were lovely, brown with thick lashes, very steady as she submitted to the scrutiny without embarrassment or shyness.

“While we’re waiting for your tea,” Barbara said, “tell me how did you know about me? Why me?”

“My daughter is your devoted fan,” Maggie said. “She wants to do what you do, work with poor people in a ghetto somewhere. As a doctor, not a lawyer, though. She’s seventeen,” she added.

“You have a seventeen-year-old daughter?”

“And an eighteen-year-old daughter,” Maggie said. “I’m thirty-five.”

Martin came out with a tray and put her glass down, glanced at Barbara’s, went back to Laurence Thielman with another glass, and returned to the kitchen, all without a word.

Maggie said apologetically, “There’s really no way I can get into it without going back to day one. I’m sorry. I’ll try to make it brief.”

“Day one it is,” Barbara said. She sipped her tea and waited.

“I live at Folsom, over on the coast,” Maggie said. “I grew up there, and the Amos lived there until recently. I’ve known them all my life. I was sixteen when Mitch Arno swept me off my feet. He was twenty-two. His nickname, which I didn’t understand until much later, was Mitch the Cherry Picker. Anyway, same old same old. I got pregnant, and his family and my parents got together and made him marry me. My mother was mortified, my father furious, Mama and Papa Arno outraged, like that. Mitch took off as soon as I started to show a lot, by May. Then, in February, six months after Gwen was born, he showed up again. I was living with my parents, they were both gone when he came, and he roughed me up and raped me. I was seventeen.”

Her voice was steady, but she had to pause to sip tea often.

“My folks came home and found me bruised and crying, and

him in the kitchen. There was a lot of yelling.” Her voice faltered and she drank again, then continued almost in a monotone. “My mother called Ray, Mitch’s brother. He came with Papa Arno, and they dragged Mitch out to the yard and Ray beat him up. Really beat him up. They took him to town and put him on a bus to Portland. I never knew what all was said, but probably everyone else in Folsom knows. Papa disowned him publicly.”

Very faintly then she said, “Karen was born nine months later. I was eighteen, with two daughters. I divorced Mitch. I took my maiden name back and changed the girls’ names to Folsom. End of day one.

“Day two,” Maggie said, in a near whisper. “Last Thursday.” Her hands were on the table, shaking. She looked at them, then put them in her lap, drew in a deep breath, and let it out slowly. “Okay. I own and manage Folsom House, a bed-and-breakfast inn, and I decided months ago to throw a big family reunion, a birthday/graduation party for Gwen, and make it something she’d never forget. She’ll be going to the university in the fall, here in Eugene. I wanted it to be very, very special for her. And Mitch came back.” She closed her eyes hard.

When Maggie opened her eyes and started speaking again, her voice was even lower. “It was late, after eleven. We’d all been busy, there had been guests in the inn, and one couple was still there, planning to check out the next morning. I was expecting sixty or seventy people. Anyway, I had just put some pies in the oven when he walked in through the kitchen door as if he’d never left. He smelled bad, was road dirty, unshaven, rumpled, as if he had been driving for days without sleep. He came in carrying all his stuff—suitcase, briefcase, a duffel bag, a sport coat over his arm—and just let it all drop inside the door. I told him to get out or I’d call the police. He...” She shrugged. “He came at me and said he’d break my arm if I gave him any lip, and he grabbed my wrist. I hit him with the first thing I could grab, the rolling pin from the worktable.” She shook her head, and a very faint smile appeared and vanished. “What a cliché, hit him with a rolling pin. Anyway, he went down and didn’t make a sound or move, and I thought I had killed him.”

She drank thirstily then and wiped her mouth with the back

of her hand. “I had to get him out of the kitchen. One of the girls might not be asleep yet, come out for water or something. I kept thinking he had come back to spoil Gwen’s party. Crazy. Anyway, I ran out to the shed and got a wagon we use to haul firewood, and got an old beach blanket from the garage. I rolled him up in the blanket and dragged him to the wagon outside the back door, and I took him to the garage and got him inside the house van, wrapped up like a mummy. I locked the van so no one would get inside. I really was crazy, but it was all I could think of. I couldn’t call the sheriff. They’d arrest me... Gwen’s big day ruined, my mother could have a heart attack, more scandal, all those people on the way. They’d come for a party and attend a wake. And my daughters... I was crazy.” She stopped again, longer this time.

“I hid his gear. I cleaned up the kitchen and took the pies out of the oven, and I remembered he must have left a car somewhere. It was in the drive near the garage. I had to get rid of it before people started to arrive the next day. That day. It was after one by then. All I could think of was to drive the car to a day-use park about two miles away and leave it there. Just before dawn that’s what I did, and I waited in the park until there was enough light to walk home on the beach, where no one would see me.”

She drank more tea, gazing past Barbara. “I made breakfast for the two customers, we cleaned their room, my housekeeper was there by then.... My parents arrived in time for lunch, and Mama and Papa Arno got there in the afternoon. I had a reservation for an early dinner for all the grandparents, the girls, and myself; by eight or nine, others would be pulling in, and we had to be back by then. There wasn’t any time to do anything about Mitch. Then the Amos decided to let me have a couple of hours with my folks—they said they would visit friends in Folsum—and we left them and went to dinner at about four. Mother wanted a little walk on the beach before dinner, and there’s easy access down in Folsum, so we left early. When we got home Dad wanted to put his car in the garage, so I had to back my car out first, not the van, a little Nissan. I looked in the van to make sure nothing showed, and it was empty. I nearly fell down in relief; I felt as if I had been living a nightmare all day and finally woke up. He had come to and left, that’s all I could

think.

“On Sunday,” Maggie went on, “most of the guests left, but a few stayed over until Monday. We had arranged for me to ride up to Portland with my brother and his wife Monday morning, and we’d leave right after my mother and father did. They took the girls down to California with them to spend a month. They adore their granddaughters. Irene and her crew came early to clean up the place; high-school kids would be around to collect chairs and tables I’d borrowed from the school, and everything would be ready for customers on Tuesday. So I went to Portland and spent the day with Laurence. He had a show in a gallery that I wanted to see; he’s an artist. Anyway, we took all day, had dinner on the way back, and got home about eleven. Irene and her husband met us at the door. Tom’s a deputy sheriff. My house had been torn apart.

“He had ripped open mattresses, chairs, couches, dumped things out of drawers, torn clothes out of closets, broken things. Every room was a disaster.” Her hands were clenched hard and her voice was vehement now. “That bastard destroyed everything he could get his hands on.”

“Easy,” Barbara murmured. “Back up a second. How? When? I thought the place was crawling with people?”

Maggie shook her head. “Irene said she got through at two-thirty, and the kids were done loading stuff in their trucks before that. She left a lot of windows open to air the place out; she said people had been smoking, and I guess they had been. Anyway, she left it airing out at two-thirty, went back at eight-thirty to close up, and found the mess. She called her husband, and he brought in the sheriff. By the time we got home, no one was there except Irene and Tom, who was going to spend the night and make sure no one did any further damage. Tom said I couldn’t stay, and Laurence couldn’t. Even his apartment was a wreck! We would have to go to the hotel in Folsom. I couldn’t move anything or touch anything until the insurance adjustor inspected it all and the sheriff’s office investigated. They said it was malicious vandalism, and I didn’t tell them about Mitch. I was too... I couldn’t say anything,” she said. “I actually couldn’t speak. We all went to my room, and suddenly Irene shoved me into the bathroom and I threw up. I could hear

her telling Tom to leave me alone a minute. I looked in the hiding place where I put Mitch's stuff, a little space you can get to from the bathroom. Everything was still there." She started to pick up her glass but pushed it away instead. "That was yesterday."

"Intermission," Barbara said quietly. "You want a glass of wine?"

Maggie nodded. Barbara stood up and went back to ask Laurence if he wanted wine, beer, anything else. He didn't. He was drawing in a small sketchbook. Taking her time, she went to the kitchen, where Martin and Binnie were hard at work preparing entrees. "Sorry," she said. "Martin, could we have a couple glasses of chardonnay?"

"You got it," he said.

She returned to the table. Maggie was standing at a window, gazing out over dazzling white cafe curtains. Barbara watched her for a moment, then made a noise moving her chair, and Maggie jerked and returned from wherever she had been.

"All right," Maggie said as she came back to the table and sat down again. "Today. I was up really early making phone calls to head off customers; Tom let me take the reservation book. And I had to find rooms for my guests. The insurance adjustor couldn't get there until ten or eleven, and I couldn't touch a thing at the house, so I was still in the hotel, in the coffee shop, when a man approached me and said he wanted to talk to me. I told him some other time. I really didn't have time."

Martin brought out their wine, and she said thank you and sipped hers gratefully. "The man said his name was Trassi, and he wanted to talk about Mitch. I hadn't told a single person that I had seen Mitch. No one. I still haven't, until now," she added.

"He said Mitch worked for a company in Southern California, and he had been sent to their Seattle branch with important papers. He said Mitch had mentioned that he might stop off and see his ex, that he had a debt to pay, but everyone assumed he meant on the return trip and had thought little of it. He was due to arrive in Seattle on Friday and never showed up. Instead, he called and at first claimed that his car had broken down, but when his supervisor told him to rent a car and get to Seattle, he said his ex had thrown him out and he couldn't get back in to collect the

stuff until Monday because there were a hundred or more people around. When he didn't show on Monday, the company sent Trassi, the company lawyer, to get the papers and find out what was happening."

Maggie stopped there and sipped her wine again. Her eyes were narrowed and a slight frown creased her forehead. "He told me they would give a thousand-dollar reward for the suitcase and briefcase, and the company would cover the damage Mitch had done to the inn. He described the briefcase and suitcase."

Barbara drank her wine and waited the few seconds it took for Maggie to resume. There was no point in prodding her; she knew what she wanted to tell, what she had to tell, and her report was as clear and precise as Barbara's would have been.

"I was tempted," Maggie said. "Really tempted. My insurance is pretty limited, the minimum that I have to carry. So there's a big deductible, and partial coverage. Anyway, before I could even ask a question, Mama and Papa Arno and Ray came rushing in, over from Eugene. I told Trassi I had to leave. He tried to keep me another minute or two, but the Amos were all over us, and he saw it was useless. I left with the Amos. We drove up to the inn, and Mama was crying, Papa cursing, like that." She flashed her fleeting smile again. "It begins to sound like a farce here," she said, almost apologetically.

"They were all talking at once," she said. "But what happened on Friday was that Papa Arno saw Mitch getting a drink from a hose near a shed, and he thought it was a bum who had stumbled out from the woods. Then he saw it was Mitch. He ran over to him and told him to turn around and beat it, but Mitch was muttering that he was going to kill me, and Papa Arno knocked him down. He thought he had to hide Mitch or someone would be killed that weekend. He shoved him inside the shed and told him to stay or he'd have him arrested. Mama and Papa Arno got together to decide what to do, and they called Ray and told him to wait at his house for them. When the rest of us went to dinner, they took Mitch to Ray's house, here in Eugene. Ray told him to clean himself up and they'd talk on Monday, that if he showed up at the inn, he'd beat him to a pulp. Then he came over. But on Monday when Ray got

home, Mitch had left. He broke some lamps, spilled beer, left a mess; we think he might have broken into Papa's house, too, but he didn't do any damage there. Then he hit my house," she said furiously. "What if I'd been there with the girls?"

Her hands were shaking again. Barbara patted one and said, "Easy. You weren't, they weren't. So he tore up the place, no one got hurt."

"Right," Maggie said after taking another of her calming, deep breaths. "Anyway, Monday when I got home from Portland, there was a message on my phone machine from Ray, for me to call him back that night. And I called him from the hotel later. He told me Mitch had been there and was gone, and I began to cry, I guess, and I told him about the inn. He wanted to come over then and hang out, just be there if Mitch came back, but I told him that Tom Lasker was on guard, and he wouldn't be allowed in. That's why Mama and Papa came over the next morning with him. We got to the inn and Mama went to pieces again, but Irene kept saying it was her fault, for leaving the place open to air out, and Tom was there telling everyone it was simple vandalism. I really wanted to tell them, at least to tell Ray that Mitch had been there, get his advice about what I should do, but Mama was crying, and everyone talking at once, and Mama and Papa so upset.... I didn't mention that I had seen Mitch. No one mentioned Mitch. I got Ray to take Mama and Papa back home. No one could do anything until the insurance man finished. Then, the first chance I got, I really looked at Mitch's stuff. The suitcase looks very expensive, leather, with a keypad lock. And the briefcase is leather, with a keypad lock. It's really heavy. His sport coat is silk, with a New York tailor's label." Her voice dropped to a whisper. "He had seven hundred dollars in his wallet and eighty-two hundred dollars in a money clip. And I remembered something I hadn't thought of again. When I went to back my car out of the garage on Friday, I saw something shining on the floor and picked it up. A watch. I just put it in my pocket, and when I went inside the house again, I put it in my bag and forgot it." Now she rummaged in the big tote bag and drew out a Rolex and laid it on the table.

Martin stepped from the kitchen and stood in the doorway.

“Barbara, you and your friends are welcome to sit as long as you need, but I have to warn you that in a few minutes I got to unlock the door and let customers in. It just won’t be as private.”

Startled, Barbara looked at her own watch. It was ten minutes before six. “We’ll be done by six,” she said. “Thanks. Maggie, tell me something about Ray. He keeps figuring in what’s happened. Do you suppose he knew Mitch was coming back?”

Maggie shook her head hard. “No way. It’s just that we all rely on him for so many things, he’s the one we all call if the car won’t start or the furnace makes weird noises. He was the first one I told when I got pregnant; he and Lorinne were engaged, and they offered to take me in, take care of me. For a while I was afraid my parents would kick me out. He’s just always been there for me, for my daughters.” She shrugged. “He’s my pal and my big brother.”

Barbara nodded, and Maggie leaned forward and asked, “Will you handle this for me? Have I told you enough?”

“Exactly what do you want me to do?”

“I want to track down Mitch and make him pay for all the damage, make him help send the girls to college, collect back child support. I don’t know! But he must have gotten rich somehow. And my daughters have gone without a lot of things over the years. I don’t want him to get away with this again. I want you to take all Mitch’s stuff out of my house and put it away in a safe place, and keep that, too.” She pushed the expensive watch toward Barbara. “I don’t want to touch anything of his. And will you deal with Trassi?”

“You’re on,” Barbara said. “As of right now we have a verbal agreement that will have to be put into writing, but later. A few quick questions. Is his car still in the day-use park? And what kind of car is it?” She slipped the Rolex into her bag.

“It’s gone. It was gone on Monday when I went up to Portland with my brother. We drove past the park and I looked. I don’t know what kind it was. Black, with leather seats, is all I know. Expensive.”

In the next few minutes they agreed that Barbara would go to the inn and collect Mitch’s stuff and put it in a safe-deposit box. Maggie gave her a brochure about the inn, where it was, how to get there. Barbara said she would bring out an agreement to be signed, and Maggie wrote a check for five hundred dollars, a retainer.

“I’ll bring a detective with me,” Barbara told her. “I’ll want pictures of the damage. And you’re not to say a word about any of this to anyone, and don’t talk to Trassi at all. Not a word.” She gave Maggie two cards, one to be handed over to Trassi, and they both stood up just as Martin walked out to unlock the door.

“By the way,” Barbara said, beckoning Laurence to join them, “if you and your friend need a recommendation for dinner, you can’t do better than right here.”

Then she muttered, “Oh, God! Dinner! So long, Maggie, Laurence. I just remembered something I have to do. See you tomorrow.” To Martin she said, “I’ll settle up tomorrow or the next day. Okay?”

“Hold it just a second,” he said. He went into the kitchen and returned with a paper bag. “Sauce for the salmon. Seven minutes an inch, under the broiler. Got that? Let it rest a minute, then sauce it. And a nice vinaigrette for the salad. Don’t use that bottled stuff. I think Binnie tossed in something, don’t know just what.”

She hugged him and took the bag, feeling guilt and relief in equal measure. The last glance she had of Maggie and Laurence was of rather bewildered expressions cast her way, before they reseated themselves. They at least would eat very well.

End of Sample Pages



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## Kate Wilhelm

Kate Wilhelm's first short story, "The Pint-Sized Genie" was published in *Fantastic Stories* in 1956. Her first novel, *More Bitter Than Death*, a mystery, was published in 1963. Over the span of her career, her writing has crossed over the genres of science fiction, speculative fiction, fantasy and magical realism, psychological suspense, mimetic, comic, family sagas, a multimedia stage production, and radio plays. She has recently returned to writing mysteries with her Barbara Holloway and the Charlie Meiklejohn and Constance Leidl Mysteries novels. Her works have been adapted for television, theater, and movies in the United States, England, and Germany. Wilhelm's novels and stories have been translated to more than a dozen languages. She has contributed to *Redbook*, *Quark*, *Orbit*, *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*, *Locus*, *Amazing*, *Asimov's Science Fiction*, *Ellery Queen's Mysteries*, *Fantastic Stories*, *Omni* and many others.

Kate and her husband, Damon Knight (1922-2002), also provided invaluable assistance to numerous other writers over the years. Their teaching careers covered a span of several decades, and hundreds of students, many of whom are famous names in the field today. Kate and Damon helped to establish the Clarion Writer's Workshop and the Milford Writer's Conference. They have lectured together at universities in North and South America and

Asia. They have been the guests of honor and panelists at numerous conventions around the world. Kate continues to host monthly workshops, as well as teach at other events. She is an avid supporter of local libraries.

Kate Wilhelm lives in Eugene, Oregon.