

BURYING
the
HATCHET



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A Kentucky Geezers Mystery



Chris Well



DEDICATION

This one is dedicated to my aunt Jean.
Thank you for believing in me!

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All scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version of the Bible.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either products of the author's imagination or used fictitiously. Any similarity to actual people, organizations, and/or events is purely coincidental.

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

Earl Walker does not want to believe his new pastor would commit murder—but the proof is overwhelming. Now, if he could just figure out how to break it to Gloria. . .

When **Gloria Logan** first met Earl, she had to convince him she was innocent of murder. Now can she convince him she's guilty of loving him?

Jenny Hutton pressured Earl into solving a full-fledged murder mystery that time at Candlewick Retirement Center. Now that the pastor is in trouble, can she get him to do it again?

Deputy Landon Fisher is just trying to do his job. But Jenny and these two pesky senior citizens keep trying to do it for him. . . .

The victim and the suspects. . .

Montague Black was a celebrity psychic riding his way to national fame by intruding on a local murder investigation. What was the secret to Montague Black's amazing powers?

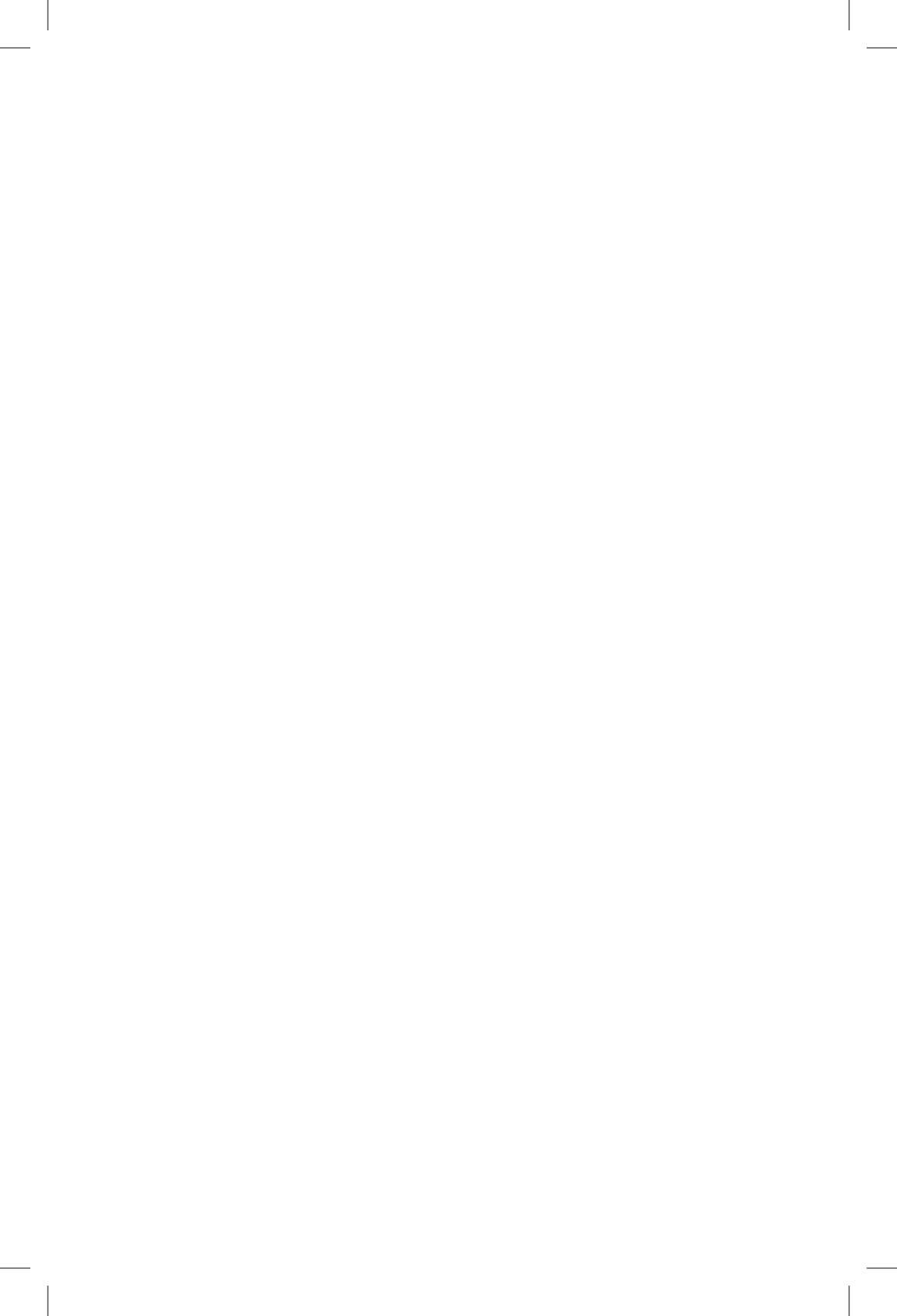
Pastor Andrew Benton, minister at New Love Fellowship, waged a public war with the so-called psychic. Did he commit murder in the name of the Lord?

Divina Zuniga nabbed the celebrity psychic with a national television deal. When he got a better offer, did she kill to seal the deal?

Jack Carpenter was the business manager for the victim. Did he cancel his client's contract permanently?

Hamilton Page was writing a book on the "Mercy Killer" murders. When the psychic refused to participate, did the author close the book on him?

Sheree Jackson, activities director at Heritage Care, claimed to be a former lover of the victim. Was she a woman scorned?



PROLOGUE

Deputy Landon Fisher was driving Sheriff Meyer to the scene, when the older man told him to stop off for coffee. Landon blinked. “Shouldn’t we step on it, Sheriff?”

“No need to get in a panic, Landy. Doc Semple is on the scene. Besides, the body ain’t gonna just get up and walk away before we get a chance to talk to it.”

The waitress returned with two steaming cardboard cups with plastic lids. Landon sipped on his coffee, barely noticing the burned flavor.

The call had come in that morning, a death overnight at Heritage Care. Normally, it would not be unusual for someone to pass away there; the residents were primarily the aged and failing, all just waiting for the end.

No, what made this a cause for concern was that in the past few weeks there’d been a couple of murders—and both victims were senior citizens. If this also turned out to be a murder, it could mean that Fletcher County, Kentucky, was home to its very own serial killer.

The drive up Old Miller’s Road was uneventful. The deputy, behind the wheel, watched the scenery go by—trees, grass, and rocks, broken up by the occasional farm. The

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cruiser took the frequent hills and turns fair enough, though the aging shock absorbers clearly needed attention.

They drove past a rusty old tractor at the side of the road. It looked like some museum piece, but they knew that Charlie McGrath only left it there the week before when it broke down. It took time to find replacement parts for the old tractor.

Landon grumbled to himself. “You’d think someone would have some pride.”

“Now, stop that fidgetin’,” Sheriff Meyer said. “We don’t know that we’ll even find anything suspicious.”

“But what if we do? Have you thought about the ramifications if this is another murder?”

“Whoo-ee! The words they teach you in school.”

“I just meant—”

“I know what you meant, son. And if you’re right, I’m sure all manner of government folk will be more’n willin’ to grab the reins. But let’s not get that wagon out quite yet—the horse still ain’t left the barn.”

“And then if Montague Black gets involved again—”

“Trust me,” the sheriff said, his voice lowering to an uncharacteristic growl, “if’n that psychic feller shows up again, I’m not about to let some showbiz type tell me how to do my job.”

The deputy drove on a bit. Finally he got up the nerve to ask, “But what if he’s actually channeling some kind of psychic energy? Don’t you worry that—”

“That man’s just a con artist.”

“But if he can—”

“I’m done talkin’ about him.”

At the intersection by the Russell farm, they were stopped by a tractor, a wagon, and a lot of straw in the middle of the road. The deputy shifted into PARK. “What now?”

Obie Withers, a wrinkled old man with one crippled arm, struggled with his straw. Some of the bales had broken open.

The sheriff greeted him. “How’s it goin’ there, Obie? Havin’ trouble haulin’ again?”

Obie looked up from the pile. He offered a toothless grin. “Ayup, Sheriff.”

Landon shouted in his most officious tone, “We’ve got to get this out of the road! The sheriff and I are headed to a crime scene!”

“Hush now!” The sheriff flashed a warning glance at the deputy then grinned at Obie. “Can we help you get loaded back up?”

“I be mush oblised.” The old man must have left his dentures at home.

The sheriff and deputy each grabbed a couple bales and threw them on the wagon. It quickly became apparent that the wagon needed to be completely restacked, or it would just spill onto the road again at the next stop.

When they had finished, Landon jumped back into the patrol car. He tried to ignore the scratches forming on his hands and forearms—not to mention the thick, sweet smell of hay now embedded in his uniform. He just wanted to get on his way. Once the sheriff was back in the car, he hit the gas. “We shouldn’t have taken the time to reload his wagon.”

“Now, if we’d just left Obie to fend for hisself, there coulda been some kinda accident. S’pose someone came ’round that curve and wasn’t lookin’—”

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“I just hate getting to the crime scene so late.”

“You gotta relax, son. Maybe it’d help to get your mind off things. If we weren’t drivin’ out here, what would you be doin’?”

“Right now? I guess filing paperwork.”

“A day like today? The sun’s out, son. Have a little imagination. This’d be a great day for doing some patrollin’, don’tcha think?”

“I guess.” The deputy grinned out his window at the passing trees. “I guess I could check how things are going down by the fishing hole. There’s this great spot down behind my grandma’s house.”

“Think so?” Sheriff Meyer squinted. “You think there might be a lot of crime taking place down there?”

“But you said—”

“I said you could do your shift outside. Didn’t say you could play hooky.”

“Oh. I’m sorry. I didn’t understand what you were asking.”

“Don’t worry about it, son.” They drove on. “Now, if you were talkin’ ’bout that creek down by the Watkins farm—now that’s a place to set up a command post.”

Landon looked at the sheriff. “Yeah?”

“Providin’, o’ course, you kept within earshot o’ your radio.”

The deputy turned onto the gravel drive for Heritage Care and parked close to the front. As they went inside, Sheriff Meyer pulled off his hat.

Eyes adjusting to the indoor lighting, Deputy Fisher took note of the worn turquoise carpeting, the chipped paint on the walls, the grime on the glass door behind him. He turned

to the sheriff. “Where do we go now?”

The older man tapped him on the elbow and pointed to a little card taped to the wall: OFFICE. Wiping one hand on his official brown pants, Sheriff Meyer followed the direction of the arrow, down the hall.

The deputy followed. “What if it’s another murder?”

Meyer let out an exasperated sigh. “Why don’t we put less energy into all this frettin’ and more into seein’ what the doc has to say?”

Landon bit his lip as they passed a series of unlabeled doors. A bulletin board held a variety of bright-colored slips of paper, each bearing a printed announcement.

They reached the office. The woman behind the desk gave them directions to the victim’s—that is, the deceased’s—quarters, room 363. The doctor was already there, along with the manager of the facility, she told them.

Sheriff Meyer thanked her for the information and flashed a smile. It was that smile that always got him reelected. Even as his temples grayed, it only made him more distinguished. He reminded Fisher a little of Sean Connery, although the deputy would never admit that to the sheriff.

In room 363, they found Doc Zacharias Semple standing over the body on the bed. Nearby, a man in an ill-fitting navy suit wrung his hands. He looked about fifty, balding, with a hooked nose like a bird’s beak.

The deceased was an elderly woman, her wrinkled face completely at peace. No visible wounds or signs of trauma—at least, not from where the deputy stood.

The man watching reached for a handkerchief and wiped his forehead. When he noticed the two lawmen, he stepped

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toward them. “This is awful—simply awful!”

“Hello, sir. I’m Sheriff Neil Meyer, and this is Deputy Landon Fisher. We’re sorry for your loss.”

“I’m just thinking what this means for our facility. Ever since the state shut down Candlewick, they’ve been watching the rest of us like a hawk. And now to think there’s been a murder!”

“Well,” the sheriff drawled, “we won’t know that until the doctor gives a verdict. Let’s hope for the best.”

The doctor let out a sigh. “Until we get the body back to the table, I can’t say for sure. But the preliminary examination doesn’t really tell us anything.” He snapped the rubber glove on one hand. “The deceased has been dead a good six or eight hours, give or take. Could very well have died in her sleep. If it weren’t for the circumstances, it would be easy enough to assume natural causes.”

The sheriff scratched his head. “That your verdict, huh?”

“That’s all I can say right now. I was waiting for Jimmy to get here with his camera.”

Jimmy Talbot was the photographer for the *Mt. Hermit Gazette-Torch*. He also doubled as crime scene photographer on the rare occasions that called for it.

Sheriff Meyer nodded. “When’s Jimmy gonna get here?”

“He was taking pictures at the school soccer match. He didn’t expect he’d be much longer.”

Landon watched the sheriff examine the surroundings. The sparse, square room was lined by grungy tile on the floor, there was chipped green paint on the walls, and worn brown-striped curtains were pulled across the windows. The bulky air-conditioning unit under the window offered hot or cold

air, depending on how you rotated the knob.

Nothing looked out of place. There was no evidence of a struggle. But then, the previous two murder scenes were found in more or less the same condition. The deaths had been ruled natural causes. In fact, if it had not been for the timely help of—

“Montague Black!” The sheriff’s voice only sounded pleasant.

Landon turned to see the celebrity psychic standing in the doorway, big as life. The man’s entourage crowded behind him, a cameraman taking in the scene. “It is good to see you again, Sheriff Meyer. I knew you’d come.”

The sheriff held up his hat to fend off the camera. “Now, this here’s a crime scene. I’m afraid none of you folks are authorized—”

“But we’ve already been here, Sheriff.”

Sheriff Meyer turned a disbelieving stare on Doc.

The other man simply shrugged. “Who do you think called and reported that this woman had died?”