

A Ruse By Any Other Name
By Mark Edgemon

"'Stairway to Murder' looks like another best seller Mr. Cornwell, but I see that the New York Reviewer crapped on it like they did your previous novels," the guy at the magazine stand remarked. "People put a lot of stock in those things."

"Yeah, I know. How much for a copy?" I said wanting to get away from there with as little embarrassment as possible.

"For you, no charge! But I got to tell you Arthur, trust me, you really don't want to read what HE said about you this month."

He was right. I wanted to read the latest bad review from this piss ant critic about as much as I'd wanted to give myself an enema with an oversized garden hose.

"Damn it to hell! That son of a... What right does he have to lambaste my runaway best seller?" I said to myself. "Sales will probably go into the toilet!"

I shook my head, *"I would kill that miserably pipsqueak if I could only figure out how to do it without getting caught,"* I thought to myself ironically being an author of murder mysteries. His latest review would likely tie a lead balloon to my current sales and send me earlier than expected back to my keyboard, if my publisher didn't decide to drop me altogether.

"Maybe I could arrange a traffic accident and push him into...hmm", I pondered to myself considering the possibilities.

I looked up in time to notice that I was standing in front of the Farnsworth Publishing building, a fourteen story, marble monstrosity, which put out the New York Reviewer, a miserable entertainment rag better used for packing material or lining animal cages.

I think it's about time I had a meeting with their chief critic, a Mr. Samuel J. Pettifogger.

"Maybe I could drop something heavy on him from the top floor of a building," I thought to myself. *"But how would I get him on the street and get away without being noticed?"*

I took the elevator to the fourteenth floor and waited for him in the hall outside his office where remodeling was underway. The outside building widow had been removed, leaving a gaping hole in the side of the building. Plastic sheets were temporarily duct taped over the opening.

As I waited, I continued with my mind fighting. *"Hmm, If could figure out a way to electrocute him when he reached for his...no...I don't know what I'm thinking. I've got nothing!"*

Just then, the door opened and a beady-eyed little squirt walked out, wearing a bowtie as one might expect and dark rimmed glasses as if he stepped out of a forties B movie.

"Hello Mr. Pettifogger, my name is..."

"Yes, yes," he said with impatient disgust while reading something as he walked into the hall. "I know who you are. You're here about my review?"

"How did you...?" he cut me off again.

"It's taken you this long to get up the nerve to meet me face to face?"

As I stood there, trying to find words through the rage that was building inside me, I decided to put my best face on and be diplomatic. Then later, I could sue the hell out of the little bastard, if he said or did anything amiss.

"I don't have all damn day, what do you want?" he stated with insistence.

"I just wanted to know what you have against me," stating my purpose as succinctly as possible.

"You inexperienced hack! It's nothing personal, I just call it the way I see it and the way I see it is, your writing is nothing more than tiresome dribble," he responded sporting a slight smirk.

"I see, you enjoy taking writers a part, because you have no real talent yourself. Your mama taught you goood," I said, getting off a cutting remark. "You may not realize, I have a degree in writing from..."

"Your tech isn't the problem," he said interrupting me with growing impatience. "Your plot development is!

"My plots have always been highly developed and well thought through," I said defending my work.

"They're too developed, that's your problem!" he said grimacing. "You're a victim of your own perceived genius. It's the same tedious, over elaborate planning with all of your stories. They're excruciatingly painful to read and never plausible," he stated desiring to cut the author down.

"Okay, how would you do it?" I asked getting angrier by the minute.

"I'm in a hurry, so try to follow me Einstein.

Most murders are done on impulse, pure and simple with very little planning. Someone gets mad and then they get even and that's pretty much it! Any of this getting through...the simpler the murder, the more believable it is!"

"Really, you mean like this!" I laughed as I shoved him with significant force.

As planned, he slid on the putty behind where I had positioned him, lost his balance and fell backwards into the plastic sheeting and through the hole where the window had once been. I watched him as he plummeted downward, hitting one of the flagpoles jutting out from the side of the building, before landing on a parking meter by the sidewalk, causing him to burst open like a ripe watermelon.

God only knows if there was still time left on the meter.

“Not bad for an over elaborate planner,” I muttered to myself as I headed toward the elevators.

As I contemplated what had just happened, I realized that he was right. You get mad and THEN you get even. It took a little nothing like Mr. Pettifogger to help me understand something so basic to the human experience.

I pondered quietly to myself, *“Thank God for critics!”*

The End