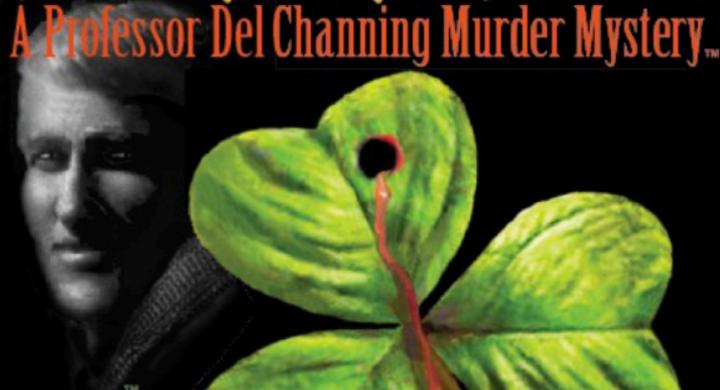


PATRICIA G.
STEVENSON

A Professor Del Channing Murder Mystery™



THE
SHAMROCK
CONSPIRACY

PROLOGUE

On Wellington Street the city was relatively quiet, save for the ever rushing cabs and a straggle of cars. The chill of the night made Del hurry as he strode across Bay Street. Del, in suit coat only, shivered and tightened his grip on his companion's elbow. His coat, wrapped around her, made his hold precarious at best. His hat sat at a jaunty angle on her head.

Everything had built to a situation larger than himself and he could find no one to trust. He hunched his shoulders trying for warmth and would have run across the street had her four inch heels allowed for more than a trot. Warmth, and a space full of people, was right ahead.

They reached the sidewalk and were passing

the fountain which designated this as an entrance to the Five Mile Mall when Del heard a hiss and felt something whiz by his face. He heard the zing of something ricocheting off the statuary and guessed it had to be a bullet. His sense of preservation allowed him to react instantly and he dived toward the pavement pulling his companion after him in a hail of ricocheting bullets and the sound of breaking glass.

Scurrying feet, screeching tires, frightened cries, then, for a moment, silence.

1

As he entered the lobby bar of the Toronto hotel where he was to meet his old friend, Professor Barret Yarrington, fear gripped Del Channing's mind. He had read the rough draft of the professor's new book about hidden IRA leadership and shuddered at the potentially deadly reaction the book could cause. It was mid-March and cold outside. He sat in the far corner of the bar facing the entryway, with a view of the Lobby through a window on his right. He watched the exiting lunch crowd struggle into their coats. The ambiance of the rich pecan wood room calmed him somewhat. His alert hazel eyes searched the doorway, then brightened as he recognized his old mentor, Professor Yarrington. Del stood, waved his right hand, then ran it through his longish, blond hair. The calm was gone. Seeing his friend again brought back the fear.

He watched his friend walk toward him, noting his physical change and recalled his shock last July when he had visited him in Dallas. The man, having been as tall as Del's six foot two, was now a few inches shorter and his strong shoulders drooped, making his frame seem even smaller. As Del's mentor at Cornell, his black hair had been in the salt and pepper stage. It was now a shock of silver white and his hands that had been so strong and eloquent were gnarled from age and arthritis.

"Del, me boy, how good you look. Not a hair out of place nor a wrinkle on your britches," Professor Yarrington said in his light Irish brogue.

The long drive from UMass in Amherst, Massachusetts, had not affected Del, nor the press of his donegal tweed jacket.

Del shook his hand and watching the professor wince when he did, made a mental note to be more gentle next time.

"Good to see you again, Sir," Del said. He motioned for the professor to sit down, then to the waitress to serve them.

"I still regret only getting to spend a few hours with you last July."

“If wishes were fishes,” the professor said smiling, “and how was Cape Cod?”

“I didn’t make that either,” Del said seriously, “what with the murder of both my friend and his bride.”

“I read about that and hoped some of what I taught you helped you find the killer.”

“That it did, Sir.”

Del looked over the professor’s shoulder and admired the two huge gargoyles that guarded the openings to the other side of the bar, subconsciously delaying their discussion of the book.

The waitress, a thin, dark-haired, woman of over fifty, smiled patiently and asked for their orders. Her name tag read Katie.

“Katie, me girl, I’ll have a pot of tea, and a biscuit,” the professor said.

“I’d like your soup of the day and the wild green salad,” Del said.

When the waitress walked away, the professor said quietly, “Have you read me book?”

“I read the rough draft of your book a couple of times and I’m impressed.”

“I was hopin’ you’d be.”

“I worry though. It seems unwise to go into as much detail as you do on the individual -- can I use the word ‘traitors’, or would ‘double agents’ be more accurate?”

“Me boy, I’d be less than fair to me duty not to point a finger. Besides, did you read a single name in the copy I sent you?”

Del’s brow wrinkled and his eyes dropped to survey the rust carpet with the outline of green leafs as its pattern.

“As keynote speaker, will you really be talking about the book?” he asked.

“I’m hopin’ it may get more people interested enough to read it and draw their own conclusions.”

“But, what if the news gets back to -- .”

“What if?” the professor said. He shrugged his stooped shoulders and grinned. “Most of them are already sweatin’ in hell.”

“And the ones who aren’t?”

“The Devil has had his day, now I’ll have me own.”

“Mm,” Del said sadly.

Again he lowered his eyes, this time zeroing

in on the marble table top.

“I’m that proud to be able to hear you read your paper. What’s the subject?” Professor Yarrington asked.

“I’ve entitled it *A Queen Disposed: Racial Conflicts in the Struggle for Hawaii, 1891-1898*. It relates somewhat to your talk, except it’s a subject well-researched by historians, not history that’s been suppressed.”

“You mean yours is safe history, don’t you?”

“Yes, professor, I mean safe,” Del said.

Katie, the waitress, brought their food and left.

“At me age, truth is more important than safety. You’d have to have been there to know who me perpetrators are.”

“And what if someone’s here at the conference?” Del asked.

He took a spoonful of the potato and mushroom soup, enjoying the intense flavor.

“Like who?”

“Like your most prominent, unnamed, politician.”

“Nay. He’s probably with the Devil -- or maybe by now he is the Devil,” Barret Yarrington said. He chuckled dryly. “Besides, what would he be doing here?”

Del picked up a slice of the herb topped bread, buttered it lavishly and bit off a large mouthful. He chewed and thought of the possible problems for his old friend; then he shrugged it off.

“Oh, Del me Boy, may your day be touched by a bit of Irish luck, brightened by a song in your heart, and warmed by the smiles of the people you love.” Professor Yarrington smiled warmly. “And speaking of people you love, tell me, how’s that wonderful Mother of yours?” Professor Yarrington asked.

“Doing beautifully. By the way, this bread reminds me of the package you sent her with the special peppers from your garden. She sent me some of her jalapeno bread so I could share.”

Barret threw his head back, laughing heartily. “She sent me some too. The problem now is, what can I send her next so she’ll mail me another care package?”

Del took off his clothes, wrapped himself in

the white terry cloth robe the hotel furnished and lay down on his bed to relax. His head resting on the mauve floral bolster.

He thought of the opening ‘welcome’ cocktail party and dinner with enthusiasm. His face softened in a pleasant smile. He would probably know a great number of those in attendance and would be able to renew old acquaintances and contacts.

The phone rang.

“Hello?”

“Del, Mildred Courtland here.”

“Millie?” Del said.

He sat up, swinging his feet to the richly carpeted floor.

“How good to hear your voice. I was hoping you’d be here.”

“How could I miss a chance to hear you read a paper and old Yarrington’s key-note address?” Mildred said. “I hear your voice and the years roll back unlocking Cornell and youth and ...”

“I know what you mean,” she said cutting him off. “Those were the days before disillusion and worldly ways crept into my plans.”

“Mm,” Del said.

He changed the phone to his left ear.

“I understand the dinner’s open seating, have you made any arrangements?” he said.

“No.”

“Professor Yarrington and I will be together, why not join us?”

“I’d like that,” she said.

“I’m sure Cornell was never the same after we all left.”

“I can’t argue that. See you at the cocktail party,” Mildred said. “Bye.”

“M-bye,” Del said hanging up the phone.

His mind went back to the last time he’d seen Millie Courtland. She was a tiny thing, not over five three, bubbly, and full of enthusiasm. She moved fast and had a tendency to brighten each area she passed through. He particularly remembered her eyes, large and bright blue.

“I wonder what she looks like now after fifteen years at a posh private university like Emory?” he said aloud.

Smiling, he laid back on the bed remembering

what it was like to be young, alive, and have only the responsibility of a dedication to his proposed future profession.

“I should take a run before the cocktail party tonight,” he said aloud to the empty room.

He pulled on his jogging suit and running shoes, along with a zippered jacket. From a drawer he took a knit hat and gloves.

He left the comfortable hotel by the front entry, to enter the thirty-four degree temperature of late afternoon and quickly started to run to keep warm. Turning off Front Street he ran south on York. His thoughts wildly anticipated seeing Millie again and hopefully Bobby Robbins.

As he passed under the railroad viaduct he recalled seeing, on the conference program, the name R.J. Robbins, who would read a paper the first day and then be a part of a panel on the second day. But try as he might he couldn't remember if Bobby was an R.J. or not.

Bobby Robbins had tended to be bean-pole shaped as a young man and already had a receding hairline when he was working on his PHD, but his attitude was not receding in any way. He was always ready to do a new experimental

project, or to get into some kind of mischief.

Professor Yarrington had bailed Bobby out of trouble more than once. He did it only because Bobby had such potential as a researcher and writer.

When Del ran under the freeway overpass, the sound of his feet pounding on the pavement echoed over the late afternoon traffic.

Del regretted the fact that he had lost touch with Bobby just before he met and married Jacqueline and did nothing to rekindle the friendship a short time later when the sizzling marriage had fizzled and divorce had followed. What a fool he'd been to let desire lead him down the garden path with someone like Jacqueline when they had nothing in common.

Del sighed, kicked up his pace and ran under a second freeway overpass. He thought of the basement coffee shop by the Cornell campus where everyone from the history department hung out. The faces floated before him, most of them nameless.

“Oh how quickly we forget,” he muttered under his breath. Fifteen years shouldn't be long enough to forget, he thought.

The street ended and Lake Ontario loomed before him, cold and still glittering from the last rays of the March sun. A sign before him read Queen's Quay Terminal and was situated beside a large, unadorned building with a clock tower in the center. He shuddered, the wind chill factor cutting him to the bone. He looked around, saw the CNN tower, and the top of the Royal York in the distance, got his bearings and headed back to the hotel at a slow trot.