

MYSTERY!

“You’re probably wondering why we’ve asked you all here.”

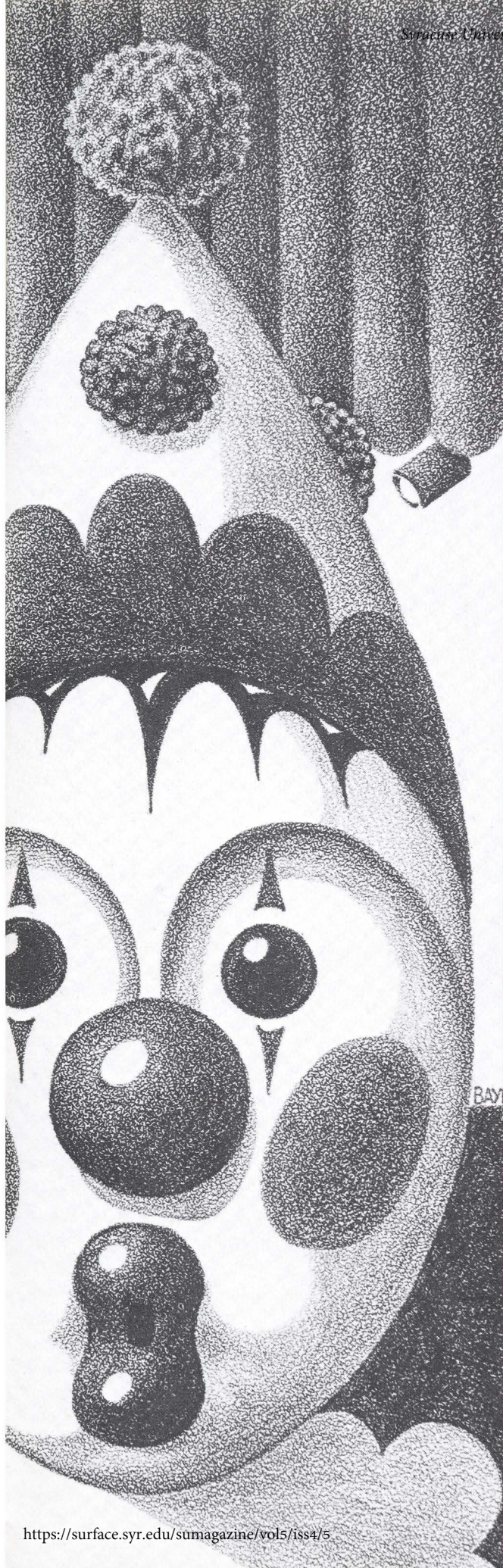
In the greater realm of literature, mystery fiction enjoys a reputation comparable to professional wrestling. And that’s too bad, because good mystery writing, like science fiction, has a stripped down, essential power to uncover human folly. The plot is often implausible, but the distilled motivations of the protagonist reside in us all.

And besides, mysteries are fun! So when we discovered that three accomplished writers in the genre are of Syracuse, we couldn’t help ourselves. Rather than telling their stories, we asked them to tell stories of their own: original murder mysteries set in academia. Their tales of intellectual intrigue and faculty foul play appear on these pages.

KILLED TOP TO BOTTOM



BY WILLIAM L. DEANDREA



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unfire rang out, and everybody in the studio went down as if he'd been shot. One of us had been—K.L. Adkinsen, Ph.D., professor of linguistics, and chairman of the Whitten College Communications Council. Tonight, though, he was the host of a

show for local cable called *The Whitten College Channel Presents a Media Circus*. Adkinsen was the ringmaster, and the newly built studio had been decked out to look like a fairgrounds, with a painted backdrop and cardboard mock-ups of concession stands. There were balloons everywhere. A little sad-faced clown stood before three or four tanks of helium almost as tall as he was, filling balloons and handing them out to everyone who walked by.

Adkinsen was speaking at the Media Circus's podium when the shooting started. When I heard the first shot, I thought it was just a balloon popping. That had been happening from time to time all evening, and people had gotten used to it. This one was louder, but I wouldn't have given it another thought, except that Adkinsen's top hat flew off.

He'd been saying something about "closer ties between the college and the larger community that supports and nurtures it . . .", but when the hat went west he turned with a puzzled look on his face to see where it went.

That's when the second shot went off. This one hit him in the side of his lofty brow, right where the smooth skin of his handsome face met his prematurely silver hair.

There were three more shots, and two of them hit him, but I didn't see it. I was too busy hugging the grey-painted concrete of the studio floor, trying to find a crack to crawl into. There was a lot of gasping and screaming and thumping as the other two hundred or so people in the room did the same. A lot of them were crawling behind the cardboard and canvas of the set, which struck me as fairly foolish. A bullet doesn't care much for one layer of cardboard or canvas, or even two or three.

It struck me as a sad commentary on our times that so many people should know what to do at the sound of gunfire. Either that, or unrest on college campuses was even worse than it had been when I'd gone to Whitten.

Not quite everybody, my brain said. It took me a second to catch up with it. Not everybody had hit the deck. One person was still standing, the sad little clown with the balloons. If I turned my head a little, I could see him standing as if in shock, with a forlorn bunch of 15 or 20 balloons rising with agonizing slowness to the ceiling above his head. He was looking at the body as if there were going to be a quiz on it later.

I could see that lone figure standing there right near the helium tanks. What if the killer didn't want anyone standing up? What if the killer decided to drop the clown with a bullet, and the bullet pierced one of the tanks? Gas, under high pressure, would rip the steel to shreds. The shreds would pierce the other tanks. The situation would turn from a mess to a holocaust before you could blink.

"Get down," I said.

The clown kept staring at the podium. Tears glistened on white cheeks.

"Get *down*, dammit!" I said. The clown turned to me and scowled, as if I were spoiling his concentration at a concert.

"*Down!*" I said again.

The clown wrote me off as a bad job and returned to gazing at the stiff and crying.

I respect grief, but this was ridiculous. Not only was this clown (possibly) putting two hundred of us in deadly danger, he wasn't doing Adkinsen any

Plagiarism
and faculty
rivalry brought
the Big Top
down on
Professor
Adkinsen and his
media circus.

good, either. Maybe 15 seconds had gone by since the last shot. That was not long enough to assume our friend with the gun was finished.

I swore under my breath, gathered my legs under me, ran five steps in a crouch, and brought the clown down with a waist-high football tackle that ended with us lying on the ground as safe a distance as I could manage from the helium tanks.

"Get off me!" the clown said. The voice was somewhat strangled. I'm six-two and weigh 225 pounds, and gentleness had been low on my list of priorities when I'd launched the tackle.

White-gloved hands beat feebly at my back. The voice yelling curses at me got stronger as it went along. It was high and clear. And this clown was pretty soft under the motley.

Oops. A Bozoette.

"Okay," I whispered urgently. "I'm sorry. But there's danger here; you go running around you'll make it worse. Try to calm down."

It didn't work. She started screaming.

"Adkinsen's dead," I said. Diplomacy was pretty low on my list by now, too. "The idea is not to join him, right?"

No luck. The screaming was getting worse. I was trying to figure out what to do when guys from campus security came in with guns. Good, I thought—let somebody else take some responsibility around here.

One of the security men came over to me and my friend. I was just about to roll off her and let her tell him her story when he smashed me in the side of the head with a six-battery flashlight, and I was gone.

I had driven from New York to Sewanka in the Southern Tier yesterday, by invitation. If I'd gotten the invitation privately, I might have skipped it, but while the envelope had been addressed to "Matthew Cobb," it had been sent through the network's PR Department, and they'd made me go.

My alma mater, Whitten College, in Sewanka, New York, after untold pain, travail, and fund-raising, was at last ready to open their newly built studio and launch their own cable TV channel on the local system, thereby bringing the benefits of faculty and student thinking to the culture-starved multitudes of the Southern Tier of New York state.

To mark the occasion, various alumni VIP's were being invited, of which I was one, by virtue of my exalted position at the network.

"Oh, give me a break," I said, but the powers above were adamant.

The first thing on yesterday's agenda had been the welcoming reception. A graduate student named Katherine Streeter had been assigned to introduce me around. She was dark and pretty, and she managed to give an impression of shyness without ever doing anything that could legitimately be characterized as shy. She certainly didn't hesitate to bust up conversations to say I was "Matt Cobb, class of seventy-blah, a vice president at the network in New York." I've never been introduced to so many people who didn't give a damn in my life.

Some people cared. Professor Harrison Billings of the Division of Performing Arts, for instance. Professor Billings was head of the drama department. Nothing ethereal about him, though. He was bald and burly and looked like a plumber. He had a grip like one, too.

He was trying hard to look academic. He wore a black turtleneck under a grey corduroy jacket with patched elbows. He smoked a pipe. He'd come to Whitten since my time, but I had heard of him from actors who worked for the network. He was well spoken of. I told him so.

"Nice to hear you say that, Mr. Cobb. It's always nice to know that *someone* holds a good opinion of you." Then he favored Ms. Streeter with a sardonic smile.

Oh great, I thought, campus politics.

"Have you come to offer advice on programming the cable service, Mr. Cobb?"

"Oh, no. Just an alumnus here for the festivities."

"Very wise of you. Chances are, you wouldn't be listened to. Adkinsen has very firm ideas about what's going to be broadcast. Rock hard, you might say."

"Oh," Katherine Streeter said. "There's Dean Jamison." She pulled me away.

As we crossed the room, I made my voice low and said, "What was that all about?"

"Professor Billings is upset that *he* wasn't named to head up the cable channel. It got to be quite a power struggle."

"From the look he gave you, I take it you were on the other side."

"I don't count. I'm just Professor Adkinsen's grad assistant. I won't even be here past June. I'm going into the doctoral program at Farber."

I was duly impressed.

"Fellowship and everything." She looked at me earnestly. "Billings wanted to put on *experimental drama*."

"Well, I'm no big experimental drama fan, but what the hell, it *is* supposed to be a cultural service—"

"Every night. He wanted to put it on every night."

Then it was time to meet Adkinsen. Katherine Streeter showed me off like a prize fish. We shook hands.

Adkinsen's sharp blue eyes looked at me suspiciously. "Cobb," he said. "I remember you. You took a course of mine."

"For a while," I said.

"That's right," he said. "That's right. You dropped it. With some rancor, I recall. We had some sort of disagreement."

"Not at all, sir," I told him. "We had an agreement."

"I'm not sure I follow you."

You asked for it, I thought. "One day in class, you treated us to a rendition of a *New York Times* story about the latest casualty figures from Vietnam. According to you, the deaths were well deserved, and quite humorous. I tend to think young men getting killed for no goddamn good reason at all is not so funny. I raised my hand and asked you what any of it had to do with the linguistics I was supposed to be there to learn. You said there were some things more important than any academic regimen."

"And I agreed. I got up and left, walked to the administration building, and dropped your course. Like a hot brick."

"Ah," he said. He smiled expansively. "We were young and passionate then, weren't we? It was all so long ago."

"Yes," I said. "It was. But the boys are still dead. Good luck with the cable operation." I walked away.

I grabbed a few more hor d'oeuvres and a glass of champagne and put them where they belonged.

Katherine Streeter caught up with me. She was not happy. "You didn't tell me you knew him."

"It's not a favorite memory for either of us."

"Sometimes," she said, "I don't understand your generation at all."

Adkinsen's adventures weren't over for the evening. At one point, there was a party crasher, a tall skinny kid in white shirt and tie, wearing a tweed jacket he'd borrowed from someone a lot shorter than he was. People looked at him as he crossed the room, but they were invisible to him. He had a glare on his face, and he was bearing down on Professor Adkinsen like Michael Jordan heading for the hoop.

I was between mingles at the moment, so I watched. The kid had something that looked like a newspaper in his hand. When he caught up with Adkinsen, he was fuming, but he waited politely until there was a break in Adkinsen's conversation. Then he unrolled the paper and waved it in front of the professor's face. He smacked the paper with his hand, not gently, and said something. Adkinsen took the paper from him and read something. The professor looked angry, and sorely embarrassed.

Voices got loud.

"—damn well *better* find out what's going on!" the kid said.

"Please, Mr. Johnson, I assure you . . ." The kid

showed signs of calming, and Adkinsen's voice fell into inaudibility. He took the kid by the elbow and walked him to the door, talking earnestly. The kid still looked upset, but he was nodding and agreeable by the time they got to the door. He shook Adkinsen's hand and left. The professor returned to his party.

Somebody groaned. Me, I think. Somebody said, "He's coming around." A third voice said, "Matt?" and I opened my eyes. That third voice belonged to E.R. Bowen, recently elected district attorney for Sewanka County, and an old friend of mine since college days.

"Aspirin," I said.

Eve laughed. "I thought you were going to ask where you were."

"I know where I am. In the Student Health Center. Why the hell did the guy clock me?"

The district attorney shook back her dark red hair. "He thought he was stopping a rape."

I tried to roll my eyes in disbelief, but it hurt. "Oh, brilliant," I said. "Yes, surrounded by two hundred people ducking gunfire and clawing for cover. The *perfect* circumstances to commit a rape."

Someone in a white suit handed me two pills and a little cup of water. I swallowed. While I did, he told me I was going to live. I'd been out about an hour.

"Feel up to coming along to headquarters?"

"Am I a suspect or something?"

"Don't make jokes about it. You might be, if I didn't have a better one. You did have a fight with the victim at that reception last night."

"That was a *fight*? Come on, Eve."

"Well, a less than pleasant encounter."

"Who have you been talking to?"

"Everybody."

"Well, everybody is a jerk."

"I think so, too. That's why you're not a suspect. I asked you to come along in case you wanted to help out."

"I thought you had a suspect."

"I'm not so sure everybody isn't wrong about him, either. Maybe you can help me find reasons not to arrest him that will keep the press off my back."

"Boy, it didn't take you long to become a politician."

I got up and followed her. Outside, Katherine Streeter was waiting on the sidewalk. Her face was recently scrubbed. She still wore the clown suit. She looked about 12 years old.

"It was you!" I said foolishly. "I didn't recognize your voice because you were screaming."

"I've been waiting, Mr. Cobb. I—I wanted to tell you I'm sorry. I shouldn't have panicked like that. My father was a cop. He told me all about people freezing in shooting situations, but after all the talk I heard about it growing up, I never thought I'd be one of them. Is your head all right?"

"They tell me I'll live."

She turned to Eve. "I've phoned a friend, Ms. Bowen. I'll just get back to my apartment and change, then she'll drive me down to the Public Safety Building to give my formal statement."

Eve told her it could wait until morning, but Katherine said, "It's all right. I don't think I'll be able to sleep much, anyway."

The Public Safety Building was a pile of ugly grey limestone, courtesy of the WPA, circa 1933. Police headquarters was in the basement.

Eve spoke to a young lieutenant. "Suspect ready?"

"Talking to his lawyer. Should be ready any minute."

The lieutenant sounded just short of elated. The chief, it seemed, was in the Bahamas on vacation, and the lieutenant was suddenly feeling every ounce of the responsibility he'd assumed. They don't get many murders in Sewanka. He was delighted to have the DA take charge of things.

Eve led me to her office, told me to sit down. We made a little small talk. Then she told me the suspect's name was

**What if the
killer decided
to drop the
down with a
bullet, and
the bullet
pierced one
of the tanks?
Gas, under
high
pressure,
would rip the
steel to
shreds.**

Alfie Johnson, and that he was a student at Whitten College.

The interrogation room was paneled in off-white soundproof panels. The suspect sat looking at his fingers as they drummed the top of a cigarette-scarred table. His lawyer stood nearby. His name was Lou Weston. He was tall and bald and his face was fixed in a permanent look of mild regret, as if he rued eating that fourth taco.

Weston said his client was willing to answer questions about what had happened last night at the reception and tonight at the studio. Eve began, gently. She wanted to know what Johnson's crashing the reception had been all about.

"Somebody stole my paper. I wrote a paper for Dr. Adkinsen's class. He didn't hand them back yet, but he told me I got an A-minus on it. I would of had a full A, but I lost points for grammar. Next thing I know, I pick up this week's *Native*—"

My God, I thought, is that thing still in business? It had started just about the time I'd arrived in Sewanka as the local "countercultural paper." It featured articles by undergraduates being pretentious about politics and films and music, but it had nothing to do with the college. It was distributed free on campus, left in piles in dorm lobbies.

"—And I found my paper in it! Someone had done it as an article. This guy 'Daddy Cool,' he's in there every week. Fixed up my grammar, I guess, but everything else was the same. Changed the title. My paper was called 'Black English on a White Campus.' In the *Native* it was called 'Alma Mother.'

"I knew the professor would be at that party, you know, so I dressed up and went to ask him what was going on. I wasn't causing any trouble. I just wanted to know."

"What did he say was going on?"

"He said he didn't know what was going on, but that this wasn't the first weird thing that happened. He said someone had been messing around in his files."

Eve pursed her lips. "Did he say who it might be?"

"He didn't mention nobody—anybody, I mean, by name. He looked at somebody, though. Professor Billings. I knew him and Professor Billings have been feuding over this TV thing, but I didn't put too much store in just one look. Anyway, Dr. Adkinsen said he'd look at the *Native*, and call them and make sure they printed something about its being *my* work they published, and that he'd get to the bottom of things as soon as this TV thing was taken care of next day. Tonight. He'd give it his full attention."

"Did it ever cross your mind that Professor Adkinsen might have stolen your paper himself?"

"No, ma'am. Why would he?" Alfie Johnson's eyes showed a flash of anger. "Dr. Adkinsen was a full professor, and a main man in his field. Why's he need to steal some little paper from a sophomore to make fifty bucks under a fake name in a little throwaway paper? Besides, he was my friend. Wasn't for him, I wouldn't be here." And Alfie Johnson told us how, as a freshman on the Whitten basketball team he'd struggled to meet academic standards, until he met the professor. Adkinsen had taken a real interest in him, arranged tutoring where he needed it, and cheered him up when he got discouraged.

"Why were you in the studio tonight?"

"It was open house. I wanted to see what was going on. Excuse me. I'd like to talk to my lawyer for a minute."

We left the room. Eve let go a breath that ruffled the hair over her brow. "What do you think?" she asked.

"If that's the best you can do for a suspect, you're hurting."

The lieutenant came up. "Any luck with Billings?" she asked.

"Not a bit. He won't admit anything except that he was there, and I don't think he'd have come across with that if it wasn't on videotape. He didn't know anything about Adkinsen's office being trashed. He says. What everybody else tells us was a blood feud over this cable TV thing, he describes as a difference of opinion, no animosity at all. Great respect for the man. Give me five more minutes, and I'll

probably have him saying that Adkinsen isn't even dead, possibly not even wounded."

"Let him sit awhile," Eve said. "I'll talk to him later. Any luck on the gun?"

The lieutenant shook his head. "Not a trace of it. Sergeant Havers says they've searched that place top to bottom three times, and haven't found so much as a bean shooter."

My brain gave a little start, as though a bright idea had just passed through it. If it had, it had been moving too fast to recognize.

Eve was talking. "... want you to do now," she said, "is find the editor or publisher of the *Native* and find out who this 'Daddy Cool' is."

The lieutenant must have been at least my age, but he blushed. Actually looked at the ground and blushed. "I... ahh... I've already taken the liberty of starting on that, Ms. Bowen. Editor and publisher. Roger Criss. I... haven't been able to find him yet, to ask him who Daddy Cool is. He's not at his home or office or any of the places he usually hangs out."

Weston poked his head out of the interrogation room and said his client was ready for us.

"There was another reason I came to the TV thing tonight," Johnson said. "I wanted to tell Dr. Adkinsen something. I wanted to tell him I got impatient, and couldn't wait, and I went to see that Criss guy who puts out the *Native*. I didn't get any cooperation at all from that guy. He wouldn't tell me who 'Daddy Cool' was. Said it was confidential."

"When did you see Criss?" Eve said.

"I don't know. 'Bout eight-thirty. Just before I came to the studio."

"Did Criss mention anything about going anywhere?"

"Not to me."

Eve told Johnson and his lawyer to hang around. Outside, she asked me what I thought.

"You keep asking me that. I think it would be nice if you found the gun."

"It'll turn up. It's got to be there. Nobody left that studio without being skin searched."

"Nobody?" I said. "Not even me?"

"Not even you," she grinned. "I supervised that one personally."

"I hope you had a good time. But I think the only way you're going to make a case here is to find that gun and tie it to somebody."

"Thank you for the penetrating analysis. We're doing what we can. As I said, it's got to be in the studio. My best men are searching for it."

"Yeah," I said. "Top to bottom." I scratched my head.

We went to another room and talked to Billings and his lawyer. I didn't blame the lieutenant for being frustrated. By the end of the interview I was beginning to hope Billings had done it, just to see what a few years in Attica would do to the smug look on his face.

There was another session with Johnson, and another with Billings, and it still boiled down to nothing.

Eve summoned the lieutenant. "Let them go," she said. "Tell them to stay in town, but let them go. We can't do a damned thing until we find the gun."

I barely heard her. I was greeting Katherine Streeter, who had walked in, as promised, to give her formal statement. She was wearing faded jeans and a polo shirt under a v-necked Whitten College sweater. It took me a moment to recognize her. I'm usually pretty good at spotting people, even after years, but Katherine Streeter, going from gown to clown to child, was too much for me.

I turned to Eve. "No," I said. "Don't let anyone go. Let's move the party to the studio."

"And what are we going to do at the studio?" she asked.

"We're going to search it," I said. "Top to bottom."

The whole gang rode over in three police cars. I told Eve what I had in mind. She said it sounded plausible, but it was by no means a sure thing.

"I know that," I said. "That's why I should be the one to do it. This way, if I'm wrong, everybody has a good horse laugh at the amateur's expense, and you press on."

The TV lights were off in the studio, and the house lights were up. There were two technicians on the scene—the lieutenant had radioed ahead and arranged for them. One stood in the middle of the vast concrete floor next to a small spotlight on a wheeled stand, the other stood at the lighting panel.

"The reason we're here now—," I began.

"I'd like to know it," Professor Billings huffed.

I ignored him. "—is to do in fact what people have been saying all night as a figure of speech. We are literally going to search this studio top to bottom."

I looked at faces—no help there. Everyone was looking at me as if I were nuts. "The sergeant and his men have already done a thorough job on the bottom of the place. That means we can concentrate on the top. Look up," I suggested.

They did, and saw what I saw, the ceiling 50 feet above, spotted thickly with the colors of the helium balloons that had been released during the party. I turned to the technicians. "Gentlemen?" I said.

The spotlight came on. The colors of the balloons bloomed in the light.

"Sweep it slowly across the ceiling," I said. "What we're looking for, folks, is a gleam of metal, or a black dot, *in front of* a backdrop of balloons. There's plenty of metal up there, with the catwalk and the lights and the grid, but they won't be the right color or shape, and they won't be isolated in front of a field of color."

"The medical examiner," I went on, "says that Professor Adkinsen was shot with a .25-caliber automatic. That's a very small, very light gun. One balloon might not float it out of harm's way, but 10 might, and 20 definitely would."

Eyes were tracking the ceiling. "To hit a man three times with a pistol like that, at fairly distant range—no one, as I recall, was within 25 feet of the lectern—is pretty fancy shooting."

I'd spotted the gun by now, but I'd known where to look. I'd "find" it if I had to, but it would be better if someone else did.

"Of course, anyone could get a gun and practice, but it doesn't make a lot of sense. In the time it would have taken to become a good enough shot to do what was done here last night, there had to be plenty of opportunities to dispose of Adkinsen more easily. This setup smacked of a spur-of-the-moment deal. It's much more likely to have been someone who, we can presume, had been taught how to shoot—"

"There it is!" Alfie Johnson was pointing ceilingward. He had it all right. Eve told the lieutenant to get up to the catwalk and snag that bunch of balloons.

I turned to Eve. "I think it's time to read some rights."

Eve said, "Sergeant?"

The sergeant was a big guy with a walrus moustache. "Yes, ma'am," he rumbled. "Who to?"

"To her," I said. "Katherine Streeter, otherwise known as Daddy Cool."

It took a long time to get the rights read to her, because she wouldn't shut up denying her guilt long enough to listen to them. First she was amused, then she was hurt, then she was angry.

Eve said, "Hey! Shut up! There are two defense attorneys in this room, witnesses to this arrest, so you can bet we're going to do this right. Besides, we don't have a question to ask you, do we, Mr. Cobb?"

"No, just some things to tell her. If you don't mind."

"No, go right ahead." That took faith. I hoped I was worthy of it.

"Here's what I'm thinking, Katherine. District Attor-

KILLED TOP TO BOTTOM

ney Bowen and the Sewanka police will check it all out, of course, but it hangs together, and it doesn't really matter anyway.

"You were the one who wrote the Daddy Cool column. It wasn't such a big deal at first, I suppose. A chance to make some spending money, a chance to sound off about things without having to face the consequences. Then you ran out of ideas, or you had a deadline coming, and you latched onto a paper you corrected as Adkinsen's grad assistant, rewrote it a little, and handed it in. You trashed Adkinsen's office to make it look as if someone might have stolen the paper from his files.

"You might even have thought no one would notice, or having noticed, that Mr. Johnson wouldn't know what to do about it. But he's proud of his work, and he goes directly to Professor Adkinsen. His friend and advisor. Adkinsen promises him he'll get to the bottom of it. Maybe he has a suspicion already, but he doesn't want to make a fuss before the opening of the cable channel the following night.

"Adkinsen might have confronted you with it, demanded you apologize, in person and in print, for your plagiarism. Maybe he just dropped a few heavy hints. Whichever, you knew he'd find out if he didn't already know. You knew your fellowship at Farber was history; that any first-rate academic career for you was out the window.

"But you went through with your part in the cable show. That was your best chance—and only yours—to kill Adkinsen. You're the daughter of a policeman. You'd know how to go about getting a gun. The authorities can find out if your father taught you how to shoot. I know how I'd bet.

"And simplest of all, *you were the one handing out the balloons*. You were the only one who could have enough balloons in one place to float the gun away without being conspicuous.

"Hell, I even saw it happen. I saw you standing there looking at Adkinsen's body with a bunch of balloons rising slowly behind you. It was the weight of the gun that made them rise so slowly, wasn't it?

"And the fact of your standing there. You were shocked, sure. But you also know that there would be no further shooting. And you were the only one who did. That's why

**"The reason
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search this
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top to
bottom."**

everyone but you hit the floor. You must have realized how funny it could look—you called attention to it yourself outside the Health Center this evening.

"Is that everything? Oh. Your hysteria when I tackled you. You must have thought I'd seen what you'd done and was arresting you."

Weston spoke. "That's rather a circumstantial case, Mr. Cobb. Not ironclad by any means."

"Not until they run a paraffin test and a few more things on Ms. Streeter's hands. No matter how hard she's washed in the last 24 hours, the tests will show if she's fired a gun."

Katherine Streeter mumbled something.

Eve said, "Please say nothing, Ms. Streeter. Unless you give up the right to counsel and the right to remain silent."

"What's the use? What's the use?" She looked like someone who had three different fours in a row on her card when someone else shouts Bingo. "What's the use?"

Eve was stern. "Do you give up those rights?"

"Sure, yes. What the hell. But it was his fault, dammit! It was Adkinsen's own damn fault."

Back at headquarters, we found out why it was his own damn fault.

"His stupid party. The stupid launch of his cable TV channel. You know that I was his grad assistant for a year, and I couldn't even get him to make a pass at me? He was so involved in the thing. And he kept me so busy the last week, I had no time to write my Daddy Cool column. It was just the way Cobb said. I figured I could sneak into the studio after a few days, get the gun back, and heave it in the lake."

Eve's voice was gentle. "You might have known we'd get the identity of Daddy Cool from Mr. Criss. The plagiarism would have still come out. You would have killed Adkinsen for nothing."

"Well, of *course*," Katherine Streeter said. "I killed Criss, too. He was the 'friend' who drove me home. He's already on the bottom of the lake. You must think I'm stupid or something."

Eve and I looked at each other, then back at her. Stupid, no. Or something, yes. I shuddered and walked out.

Professor Billings, of all people, was waiting outside for me.

"I wanted to congratulate you, Mr. Cobb. Such drama! I was quite taken away, even though I was a suspect, myself. I imagine I'll be asked now to run the cable channel. What a TV play this will make!"

"Fine. My gift to the school." I tried to move on, but he grabbed my sleeve.

"But there's one last thing I don't understand."

"Just one? You're way ahead of me."

"No, seriously. Why all the rigamarole at the studio and all? Why not simply have run the paraffin test on Ms. Streeter as soon as you suspected her?"

"Because we weren't sure it would have worked."

"I thought you said no matter how hard she'd washed—"

"She was dressed as a clown," I reminded him. "You saw her. She was wearing gloves."

Billings burst out laughing. "A bluff! A psychological manipulation! Brilliant."

"Listen," I said. "Do me a favor, okay?"

"If I'm able."

"You're able. When you've written your play, and cast it and rehearsed it, and mounted it, and are all set to give it its gala premiere . . ."

"Yes?"

"Do me a favor and don't invite me."

WILLIAM DEANDREA

Matt Cobb, Detective at Large

Little do the well-meaning faculty members of Whitten College understand that TV executive Matt Cobb is, in truth, a high-level corporate snoop and trouble-shooter. Cobb is the protagonist of five novels by William DeAndrea. A sixth is coming soon.

The fictitious Whitten College, the town of Sewanka, and some of the characters featured in this story were first created for DeAndrea's *Killed With a Passion*, published in 1983. Other Cobb books are *Killed in the Ratings* (1978), *Killed in the Act* (1981), *Passion*, *Killed on the Ice* (1984), and *Killed in Paradise* (1988; due in paperback this summer). DeAndrea is the author of 14 books in all, including *The HOG Murders* (1979) and a four-part spy series that includes *Cronus* (1984), *Snark* (1985), *Azrael* (1986), and the upcoming *Atropos*.

DeAndrea, who lives and works in Watertown, Connecticut, received a bachelor's degree from the Newhouse School in 1974. Two of his novels, *Killed in the Ratings* and *The HOG Murders*, received Edgar Allan Poe Awards for mystery fiction.