

"Has all the right ingredients." —*Mostly Murder*

PARSLEY, SAGE, ROSEMARY & CRIME

TAMAR MYERS



A Pennsylvania-Dutch
Mystery with Recipes

“I AM NOT A KILLER.”

“You threatened him in public, Magdalena.”

“I did not!”

“Yes you did. I have depositions from at least five witnesses who say that they heard you threaten to kill him.”

My heart began to pound. “I said something to the effect that he could only shoot the lurid scene over my dead body. I certainly didn’t threaten to kill him.”

“You said over *his* dead body,” said Officer Melvin Stoltzfus pompously.

“I don’t see what difference that makes. You know I didn’t mean it.”

Melvin’s left eye swiveled ever so slightly, but independently, in its socket. “The difference is that his dead body, not yours, was found nailed to the center beam of your barn.”

“Forked,” I corrected. I don’t think Melvin heard me.

“And you, Magdalena Yoder, are what we might call *suspecto numero uno*.”

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For my parents, with love and respect

I would like to acknowledge the wise, tempering hand of my editor, Judy Kern, the sweet temper of my agent, Nancy Yost, and the temper tantrums I did *not* throw when my husband, Jeffrey, made his own astute suggestions.

One

I should have known there would be trouble when a man who introduced himself as Bugsy showed up one morning and offered to buy the PennDutch Inn.

"It's not for sale," I said.

"Lady, everything's for sale. For the right price." I thought about that for perhaps three seconds, and came up with three things that were definitely never going to be for sale: my virtue, Grandma Yoder's hand-crocheted lap robe, and, of course, the Penn-Dutch Inn. Of these three, I guess I'd have to say that the inn would be the last to go. I mean, how could I ever sell the place where four generations of my family had been born, and at least a couple of generations had died?

"You couldn't name a figure that high," I said to Bugsy.

Bugsy pulled a little notepad out of his suit pocket and scribbled down some numbers. "An offer you can't refuse," he said with a smirk.

I refused.

Bugsy got busy scribbling again. "Playing hardball, eh?"

"I don't even play Ping-Pong with strangers." But just to hedge my bets, I glanced at the scrap of paper. My heart began to pound as if I'd just played five

games of Ping-Pong at the church social. I may even have swayed a little.

"It's a great deal," said Bugsy. "I mean, this place is a dump. It's gonna have to be totally demolished anyway. That there's a lot of moola for a joint like this."

That did it. That hiked my hackles. The PennDutch Inn is anything but a dump. It only barely qualifies as rustic. Sure, it's over a hundred and fifty years old, but the inevitable nicks and scratches garnered over that century and a half give it that certain special *patina*. That's what that yuppie reviewer wrote in her column, the one who made the PennDutch the most famous inn of its kind in the eastern half of the country.

"Scram," I said sweetly. "Get lost. Take a long walk down a one-way road."

"Do you know who the hell you're talking to?" Bugsy had grabbed both lapels of his suit and was tugging outward at them, apparently in a vain attempt to make himself appear bigger.

"Sure, I know who I'm talking to," I said. "I'm talking to a rather skinny young man with a large whitehead on his left nostril who's wearing a gray polyester suit that needs pressing badly." Honesty is my forte.

Bugsy didn't blink. "Okay, lady. If you don't want to sell, how about leasing the joint?"

"No need," I said. "I already rent rooms. By the week. And everything's been booked for the next two years. Now, like I said, scram."

Bugsy didn't budge. "I don't want to rent a room, lady. I want to lease the place. The entire joint."

"They give free hearing tests at the high school on the first Tuesday of every month," I informed him.

Bugsy didn't back off. "I want to lease this place

for eight weeks, for half of what I was willing to buy it for."

I decided to trot on down to the high school myself. It had been a while since I'd had my ears checked. "Would you please repeat what you just said?"

Bugsy obligingly backtracked.

"Now, why would you want to do that?" I asked. I was born forty-four years ago, and while I haven't slept my way around the block like my sister, Susannah, I have been around it a couple of times.

"It's simple," said Bugsy. "We're filming a movie. Reels and Runs Productions. I'm the advance man. We want to use your inn as the location."

Okay, so that in itself excited me, but not so much that I was ready to throw all caution to the wind. Susannah has told me that there are movies in which ... well, never mind. But if anybody did that at the PennDutch Inn, even if it were just acting, Grandma Yoder's ghost would never leave me alone. "What kind of movie will it be?" I asked.

Perhaps spotting my weakness, Bugsy began to blather. "It will be a full-length feature film, of course. We've got some first-rate Hollywood talent lined up. The producer is—"

"What is the movie about?"

Bugsy burped. "Murder, of course. You know, those two that happened here."

I should have known. He meant the double murders last year, which got written up in a book by some dilettante author who lives all the way down in South Carolina. You remember, the ones that happened the week I inadvertently rented the inn to a hunting party *and* a group of animal rights activists on the same weekend.

"I'm assuming, then, that you are prepared to buy the rights to the story as well," I said sagely. Just

because I don't watch much television doesn't mean I'm illiterate.

Bugsy appeared baffled. "Rights? What rights? Lady, this isn't a docudrama. This is a feature-length Hollywood production."

"All the same, Mr. Bunny, you need to have Susannah's and my permission, not to mention that a whole host of others are going to have to give their approval before Reels and Runs can run those reels."

"The name's Bugsy," he said belligerently. He glanced down at his notepad and pretended to scan a few pages. "Ah, my mistake, Miss Yoder. This movie, *The Quilted Corpse*, isn't going to be about those exact murders, it was simply inspired by them. Actually, there are five murders planned, and the victims are all men, so you see, it's not at all the same."

"Nevertheless, Mr. Bugsy, if my sister and I find ourselves portrayed in that movie, we will, of course, be compelled to sue."

"Sue away," babbled Bugsy blithely, "because, like I tried to tell you, you aren't even in this one."

My mind flicked back to the real murders, and the period since then. It was, of course, a horrible ordeal for survivors and victims alike, but afterward, business picked up quite a bit. You wouldn't believe the number of folks who want to sleep in the rooms where the murders happened, or even in the very bed where Susannah found the corpse clutching Mama's best Dresden Plate quilt.

"Even if your movie was only inspired by the real murders, this kind of publicity could give my inn a bad reputation," I said evenly.

"Which is why I'm willing to pay half of the buying price I quoted," said Bugsy. He looked hopeful.

"Make that two-thirds of the high figure you

quoted, plus me and my sister get to remain at the inn, and we have a deal."

Bugsy didn't balk. "Deal. Now, of course, we may need to gut a few walls and raise a few ceilings, you understand. For the camera and lighting equipment and all."

"Gut one wall and die," I said, or something to that effect. I know, I am an Amish-Mennonite with a long heritage of pacifism, but I have human limitations, and Bugsy was bumping into my boundaries. If I don't stand up for myself, who will? Not my sister, Susannah, that's for sure. She hardly stands up at all anymore if she can help it.

Bugsy began to bargain. "Look, we'll make as few structural changes as possible, and whatever changes we make, we'll change back to the original before we're through. You won't even be able to tell that we've been here. And, of course, you'll have full approval and veto power over any changes in advance."

I wasn't buying Bugsy's bit. "How can you replace a one-hundred-and-fifty-year-old wall with a new one and still have it be the same?"

Bugsy was unabashed. "Easy. That's called syntho-materialistic substitution. It's just one of the many wonders of Hollywood."

"Make that three-quarters of the price you quoted and we have a deal. And, of course, I'd still have veto power."

Bugsy beamed. "Of course. And it's a pleasure doing business with you, Mrs. Yoder."

"That's Miss. Miss Magdalena Yoder."

"Name's Steve."

"Steve Bugsy. It has a certain ring to it," I said charitably.

Bugsy had been bluffing. "It's Steven Freeman, not Steven Bugsy. Bugsy is a Hollywood thing."

I tried not to frown. Susannah says she could plant corn kernels in my frown furrows. "I am not familiar with the Hollywood scene, Mr. Freeman. But here in Hernia, Pennsylvania, we tend to be straightforward."

Bugsy bellowed in apparent delight. "You're a gas, Miss Yoder. Say, do you always look like this?"

"Like what?" I glanced quickly down at my long-sleeved blue dress and my sensible shoes. Unless I had another piece of broccoli caught between my two front teeth, I was sure I looked just fine.

Bugsy belched again. "You look, uh . . . authentic, Miss Yoder. You ever do any acting?"

Being the gracious and cheery owner of a trendy and very busy inn is a full-time acting job. But outside of that, I'm sure my experiences didn't qualify at all. Except for the occasional rerun of *Green Acres*, which I managed to catch on Susannah's little black and white portable, I didn't even watch TV.

Bugsy barged ahead before I could answer. "Never mind. If you want it, I'm sure you'll get the part. Of course, we'll have to give you a screen test first."

"Will they be true and false questions, or multiple choice?" I asked in all sincerity. Just as long as they weren't essay questions, I stood a chance.

"It's not that kind of a test, Miss Yoder. It's a test to see how you come across on the screen. The movie screen. We just shoot some film and have you say a few words."

I should have said "Get behind me, Satan." Instead, I said, "Come on in, Bugsy, and I'll get you a cup of brew." I meant coffee, of course.

"Vanity of vanities, all is vanity," said the author of Ecclesiastes, and he was right. If I hadn't been so

vain the day I met Steven Freeman, alias Bugsy, there wouldn't have been a third murder to add to the Penn-Dutch's growing list. And this third murder was to be the most gruesome of them all. What follows is exactly what happened.

Two

Hernia, Pennsylvania, is a nice place to live, but you wouldn't want to visit there. Unless you have family, or get your kicks out of being comatose, there isn't much to do. Yoder's Corner Market and Miller's Feed Store are the only two commercial establishments in town worth noting, at least since Bob's Gas Station stopped selling Ho-Hos and bottles of Yoohoo. Most of Hernia's work-force spend their weekdays in nearby Bedford or Somerset. Their summer evenings are spent on their front porches, their winter evenings in front of a fire. They are, by and large, a conservative, religious lot who are either very happy or too ignorant to know better.

Norah Hall, the town's most accomplished gossip, and therefore statistician, informs me that there are only fifty-three television antennas scattered about town. There just happen to be three hundred and eleven residences in Hernia, a mountain town that doesn't get cable. According to Norah, then, only a fourth of Hernia's fifteen hundred and twenty-eight residents watch TV on a regular basis. That figure does include Anna Guildersleeve, who at last count was said to harbor thirty-seven different personalities in her one rather diminutive person. So much for statistics.

My point is that when the news that Runs and Reels