

URI GELLER



DEAD COLD

'Kept me guessing 'til the end... A great thriller'
JAMES HERBERT



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Uri Geller



HEADLINE
FEATURE

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Dedicated to the memory of the Chairman of the Board,
Frank Sinatra,
who died during the writing of this book.

Panagiotis Michalakopoulos

*One thing leads to another,
Too late to run for cover,
She's much too close for comfort now!*

Frank Sinatra: Too Close for Comfort
Bock/Holofcener/Weiss – Carlin Music Corp/Memory Lane
Music Ltd, 1959

CHAPTER ONE

The first thing I want you to understand is I could never survive without Mimi.

The second thing is, I talk a lot. A lot a lot. So if this veers off the point from time to time, bear with me. I do radio, you've got to fill the gaps. The worst thing with radio is long silences. The second worst is short silences. Any kind of a silence is bad.

My publisher says books aren't like this. I got to stop and pick my words. But I tell him – I stop, I dry. I'll just let it flow. I'm doing this in one take, and if I use the wrong word now and then – who's noticing?

OK, from the top, because that's the only way to tell a story. From start to finish. You want flashbacks, dream sequences, whatever, this is the wrong book. I try to do flashbacks, I get lost. Believe me, keep it simple. You want flashbacks, read Proust.

So it starts on a Thursday. Definitely a Thursday. I wouldn't normally remember what I said on which show, largely because I'm making it up as I go along, but this show is fixed in my mind. Because of the very bad things that happened to me the next day.

I was sitting where I always sit, across the desk from

URI GELLER

Kerry. Mimi was beaming at me through the window, signalling thumbs-up, 'Everything's going to be great!' And suddenly I got this bad, bad feeling. Everything was not going to be great.

God knows why. It isn't as if I'm psychic.

I guess you thought I was, if you ever heard my radio show. If you're the kind who listens to radio psychics, you probably believe in your horoscope, and lucky lottery numbers, and spooky coincidences, headless nuns on the stairs, magic crystals, all that stuff. Maybe you're pretty shocked to hear the truth. I know, I put on a good act. Sometimes I believe it myself. So I guess I've got some explaining to do.

The first thing is Mimi. She sits in the engineer's booth, with the producer, and she takes the calls. She screens out the screwballs, and she quizzes the rest of them.

Anyone who phones in is hoping to get on the radio. That's the whole point. If they wanted a serious consultation, they'd write and ask for a personal one-to-one. It happens, once in a while. Mainly in the fall, for some reason. I charge £35 an hour and let the client do all the talking.

Radio's different. I have to get the ball rolling. I have to be psychic. That's what it's all about. But because the callers want to be on radio, they don't mind telling Mimi a few personal things. She starts off nice and simple – name ('Is that your real name, the one you were born with?') and address ('Are you calling from home?') and age ('Have you been a fan of Mikki's for long, then?')

After that it's, 'And what did you want to talk to Mikki about?' Usually they go coy then, they say, 'Well, he's psychic, he can tell *me* what it's about.' So Mimi agrees and she checks helpfully on a couple of facts ('It could be

DEAD COLD

five or ten minutes before he gets to you, you don't mind waiting? You're not too busy? You know it's a Freephone number, don't you? So do you listen often?')

All the time she's tapping notes and comments into the terminal at her end of the mixing desk. And what she types comes up on the studio VDU.

She's very good at her job, my little Mimi. She looks after me.

I'd trust her judgement without question. So why, before that show, on that Thursday, when her happiness was shining in her funny round face and her excited thumbs were wagging at me, was I getting such a bad feeling?

I glanced at the monitor. Only two lines of type, and I had to lean over a little to read it. Thin black letters on a blue background – maybe these computer people have shares in Optrex.

'Sarah Whelan, Mrs. Age 47. Lives Evans Grove, Hounslow. Wants to know if animals pass over to the other side. PS thinks you're lovely. I let her keep believing it.'

I managed to grin at Mimi. She grinned back, which made her slanting eyes disappear altogether. Her face reminded me of a happy little apple, with spots of red on her yellow cheeks. The fringe of her hair was very straight, very severe, like a black plastic helmet – something out of a Samurai movie. Not that she was Japanese. I offended her once with that assumption. She was a Londoner, and her parents were South Korean.

She forgave me the offence. Mimi liked forgiving me.

I slipped the cans over my head. One ear on, one ear off – otherwise you can't hear yourself think over the echo when you start talking.

They were playing my song. One of my songs, anyhow.

URI GELLER

'New York New York'. Sinatra. Anything by Sinatra rates as one of my songs. I claim them as my own.

That uneasy feeling melted away, and the music must have been making me look happy, because Kerry flashed one of her looks at me. Some smile that girl had. Wasted on radio. Bright blue eyes. And blonde hair, brushed straight back from her forehead and behind her little pink ears. Everybody was expecting her to head into television any day now, and they'd been expecting it for three years. Maybe when Kerry Allison said she liked radio, she meant it.

She pressed the fader on Frankie and said: 'That's "New York New York" which can only mean our very own Boy from Hoboken, ol' brown eyes is back - hello, Mikki.'

Now I don't know where Kerry got the idea I come from Hoboken like Sinatra, because the fact is I come from across the river in Brooklyn. But she always says it, and maybe it's because I told her it was true. These things happen. So I don't correct her.

I said, 'Hi, Kerry, nice to be here. My senses are telling me something and I don't believe the listeners are picking up on it.'

'Tell us then?' She looked at me and fiddled with her hairgrip. I sometimes teased her on air, and she didn't know quite how to deal with it. She liked it, but she tried not to get drawn in.

'You've bought something new to keep the hair out of your eyes. Kind of got tiger stripes on it. See, I never said this was my psychic sense. It's just everyone listening in, they can't see you. Kerry has long golden hair, if you don't know, but without a hairslide her face disappears. The curtain comes down.'

DEAD COLD

'I had a boyfriend once who told me when that happened I looked like I had a lampshade on my head.'

'I'm glad he's in the past tense. Never go out with a man who compares you to an item of furniture.'

I glanced up at Mimi. She wasn't smiling. She couldn't stand me flirting with Kerry. I winked at her, and she forgave me. I think I told you already, she liked forgiving me.

That bit of banter, it serves a purpose. Maybe you thought it was the radio equivalent of tooth fillings, plugging the gaps. It's more than that. The listeners need to settle. A new voice stirs them up – who's this, what's he talking about, sorry where were we? So I chat a bit, let them get used to my voice, mention the words 'psychic' and 'energy' once or twice.

OK, on with the show. Let's go to the phones. 'Hi, who's this?'

'This is Sarah. Hello, Mikki.'

A friendly voice. Thank you, Mimi. Sometimes they can be very aggressive, and I have to admit aggressive is something I find hard to handle. I don't mind a good debate, I can even handle an argument. But aggressive is when they snarl out a word or two and then go silent on me. 'You think you know it all.' That's one. 'If you're psychic why aren't you a millionaire?' That's another. Most radio hosts would just snap something aggressive back, but that isn't my style. I tried to sound wise and pitying a few times, but it just came over all nervous. So I figure it's best to pretend I heard nothing, close the line and go to the next caller. After all, who's in control here?

Conversation not confrontation, that's my motto.

'Hello, Sarah, I seem to sense a sadness in your voice.'

'Well, yes . . .'

'In fact it's something deeper-lying than your voice, because maybe you feel this is a sadness that's hard to express.'

'Mikki, that's so right.'

Of course it's right. She already told Mimi why she's calling – do animals have an afterlife, she wants to know. And the only reason for that is she's just lost a pet. So she's sad. Only people aren't supposed to take it so hard when it's just a pet that died. It's kind of like saying your pet meant more to you than most people.

So be honest. Of course your pet meant more. You loved it. It loved you. You find a human being means that much to you, you marry them.

I'd say this to Sarah, but I'm not an agony uncle. The show has one of those already. I'm the psychic.

'Are you sad about an animal? Because if that's the case, I don't think you have to be.'

'Why? Why? Do you . . .'

'I sense a presence.'

'Oh! Is it—?'

Well, come on, Sarah! Is it *what*? Do I have to guess what kind of animal it was? Give me a name at least! But she's too choked up to get the words out. This is a little tricky. I don't want to sound like I'm fishing for hints. But I'm used to this. It's what I do for a living.

'Now I'm going on impressions here. I'd like to emphasise I don't know anything about Sarah. I don't even know your second name, do I?'

'No, no, we've never spoken before. But you can sense—?' God, she's crying again.

'Sarah, please. I sense much warmth, much love here.'

'Yes, she was a very loving little thing.'

DEAD COLD

Thing! *Thing!* Is that any way to talk of a dear departed pet? It tells me nothing.

'Very faithful,' Sarah adds.

Faithful! So dogs are faithful . . . 'That type always are.'

'Well, the word is variety. To a breeder.'

Variety! What comes in varieties? Apart from Heinz tinned foods? Fish – but when are fish loving and faithful?

Mimi is at the window, flapping her arms. This is studio lingo for, 'We've got a crisis on here,' but the producer is staring remotely at the ceiling. Some crisis.

Flap! Flap!

Got it! I want to stand up and shout, 'Bird! Bird!' But I don't.

'I feel this little spirit, fluttering around the studio. And I get an impression of vivid colour . . .'

'Edna was an Amazon macaw, the most gorgeous parrot you've ever seen.'

A dead parrot. What was this, Monty Python?

'And I can assure you, Sarah, that beyond the veil Edna still is.'

'Thank you, Mikki, thank you so much.'

Well, not at all. That's what it's all about. Doesn't hurt anyone, cheers a few people up every day, provides some general entertainment. Everything in life should be like this.



CHAPTER TWO

The spidery letters on the blue screen read: 'Eric Vasey, 61, lives Shooter's Hill. Says he's got a worry about his future. Bit nervy about taking psi-power seriously.'

No problem.

'Eric, before you say a word, I'm getting a very strong impression of you. I know you've told my production assistant your name and address, but that's all – and yet, this is uncanny, I'm finding it pretty spooky but I feel like I know you better than your best friend.

'You are no fool. That's very strong. And you prefer the company of people who are also intelligent – but if they aren't up to your mark, you exercise patience. In fact, basically your temperament is self-contained, you can cope without people and you might even get on better, but you have this talent for working and socialising with others. Your sense of humour helps a lot there, even though it tends to mask a serious and thoughtful person. I know you try not to show it, but there are great wells of sensitivity in your personality, Eric. I think you feel things very deeply. That's under the surface. People see a confident, outgoing man, someone who can be a perfectionist and at the same time you don't like to be snowed under with irrelevant detail.

URI GELLER

That adds up to a pretty complex guy, Eric – but shall I tell you why I can read it so exactly? Because you're focused. You can home in on your objective. And that strength of mind is like a beam of energy hitting me right now.'

'Mikki, that's . . . that's pretty good. Amazing.'

'You made it easy, Eric.'

I didn't tell him the tough part was making it sound different from what I always tell everyone. That was a perfect Cold Reading. How much of it was he going to disagree with? Who wants to hear they are stupid, impatient, arrogant, a sheep, friendless, humourless, frivolous, thoughtless, insensitive, introverted, careless, an anorak, a simpleton and a dilettante?

Plus, that stuff is so vague. Now it's up to Eric to paint in the detail, which he duly does, assuming that I know him inside-out so why hide anything?

He was worried about money, and I told him not to expect a big windfall but stick to his budget, and that way his guardian angel would make certain there was always just enough to survive on.

It would be irresponsible of me to say, 'I see a giant lottery win, so stop worrying and start spending.' That wasn't even what he wanted to hear. He just wanted to know he would cope. And without wanting to go in detail into his finances, I knew he would cope. He'd coped for sixty-one years, after all. The future always looks scary if you try to take big bites out of it. Just go for one day at a time – that's all you'll ever be asked to manage.

Damn, I took a wrong career turn somewhere. I really should have been an agony uncle. Or a priest.

Most agony preachers are ex-doctors, obviously. Failed doctors, sometimes, but at least they got as far as failing their

DEAD COLD

exams. I got as far as being kicked off the second year of my American Commerce college course. And my religion, very nominally, is Greek Orthodox. I never thought I'd look too good with a beard like a tea-tray.

Of course, you wouldn't know. You've only seen me on the radio.

There's a black pane of glass next to Mimi's window. This is the Privileged Guests Area, where the station directors take anyone they want to impress. Reclining leather seats, opaque Pyrex coffee tables. You can smoke, but cigars only. And because of the way it's lit, with big bright lighting in the studio and a kind of join-the-conspirators'-club dusk in the suite, they can see us and we can't see them. All we can see is our reflections. To be accurate, I can see myself but Kerry would have to turn round.

If one of these Privileged types tells me, 'I was watching you through the one-way glass,' of course I answer mysteriously, 'I was perfectly aware when your eyes were on me - and when they were elsewhere.' Guilty conscience, everybody's got one. It takes a psychic to spot it.

So I find I'm looking at my reflection from time to time. I'd be lying if I said I hated what I saw. I'm an OK-looking guy. It's the Mediterranean blood. We're Greeks. Third generation Americans, but very racially pure. One hundred per cent Greek peninsula. No European contamination. My father used to say, 'I'd sooner have cut my dick off than marry a girl from Macedonia.' Which didn't stop the old goat chasing the women from the pretzel bakery at the back of our tenements, but then I don't believe he ever went closer to our ancient homeland than Dimitris Taverna in Queens. He was always too scared to fly.

Which doesn't tell you anything about my reflection.

URI GELLER

Or maybe it does. I look like my name – Panagiotis Michalakopoulos. Call me Mikki. My curls are almost black, my eyes are so brown they're almost black, and if I don't shave in the afternoon, I eat dinner with a very black and piratical stubble. My looks are on the romantic side. Mimi wanted me to wear gold hoops in my ears, but that would be too much tinsel on the Christmas tree. Plus, if my brothers ever saw me, they'd think I had gone gay. I said to Mimi, 'You want to tie up my head in a red bandanna too.' You could see she thought it might be rather fetching.

That's the truth why I'm a psychic. With looks like mine you've got to do something unorthodox. People expect it. And when you start telling their fortunes, they believe you.

You want to try an experiment? Get your hair cut, wear a three-piece suit with blue braces and a big tie, stand in Covent Garden market and offer to do astrological readings. It's inappropriate behaviour. You'll get no takers. But put a dark-eyed rascal in the same place, with tight denims and a leather jacket, and there'll be two dozen eager folks thronging him inside a minute. Believe me. I've tried it.

That's how I got thrown out of college, for doing astrology readings. Plus, I shouldn't have been generating them on one of the faculty's Apple Macs. And particularly I shouldn't have taken the Mac home with me for the purpose. I appreciated that, when it was explained to me. I tried to be very contrite about it, but there's only so far you can get with being contrite.

Anyhow, that episode launched me on my career, and not everyone on my course can say the New Jersey Institute of Business and Commercial Studies did so much for them.

What I learned from astrology was this: People like to hear good things about themselves. You don't need a