

WILLIAM X. KENZLE

Bestselling author of **EMINENCE**

A mystery writers' conference
plays host to
flesh and blood murder....

MASQUERADE

A Father Koesler Mystery

"A shocker."

Publishers Weekly



BB

Ballantine/Mystery/36620 (Canada \$6.99) U.S. \$5.99

MASQUERADE

William X. Kienzle

BALLANTINE BOOKS • NEW YORK

Copyright © 1990 by GOPITS, Inc.

All rights reserved under International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. Published in the United States of America by Ballantine Books, a division of Random House, Inc., New York, and simultaneously in Canada by Random House of Canada Limited, Toronto.

No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever except in the case of reprints in the context of reviews. For information write Andrews and McMeel, a Universal Press Syndicate Company, 4900 Main Street, Kansas City, Missouri 64112.

This is a work of fiction and, as such, events described herein are creations of the author's imagination. Any relation to real people, living or dead, is purely coincidental and accidental.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 89-77890

ISBN 0-345-36620-4

This edition published by arrangement with Andrews and McMeel, a Universal Press Syndicate Company.

Manufactured in the United States of America

First Ballantine Books Edition: April 1991

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Gratitude for technical advice to:

Ramon Betanzos, Ph.D., Professor of Humanities, Wayne State University

Father William Dowell, Pastor, Prince of Peace Parish, West Bloomfield, Michigan

Jim Grace, Detective, Kalamazoo Police Department

Sister Bernadelle Grimm, R.S.M., Samaritan Health Care Center, Detroit

Timothy Kenny, attorney-at-law, Larson, Harms & Wright, P.C.

Sister Patricia Lamb, R.S.M., Pastoral Associate, St. Joseph the Worker Parish, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Irma Macy, Religious Education Coordinator, Prince of Peace Parish, West Bloomfield, Michigan

Gerald P. Maloney, Chief Substance Abuse Therapist, Heritage Hospital, Taylor, Michigan

Sergeant Mary Marcantonio, Office of Executive Deputy Chief, Detroit Police Department

Donna Martin, Vice President and Editorial Director, Andrews and McMeel

Thomas J. Petinga, Jr., D.O., FACEP, Chairman, Department of Emergency Medicine, Mt. Carmel Mercy Hospital, Detroit

Walter D. Pool, M.D., Medical Consultant

Noreen Rooney, TV Book Editor, *Detroit Free Press* (Retired)

Joseph G. Schulte, Executive Vice President, Ross Roy Communications

John E. Shay, Jr., Ph.D., President, Marygrove College

Sister Jan Soleau, I.H.M., Director, Alumni Relations, Marygrove College

John Sommerfeldt, Ph.D., Professor of History, University of Dallas

Werner U. Spitz, M.D., Professor of Forensic Pathology, Wayne State University

Inspector Barbara Weide, Youth Section, Detroit Police Department
Rabbi and Mrs. R.W. Weiss

The Reverend Canon and Mrs. C. George Widdifield, Pastoral Associate, Christ Church Cranbrook, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan

Any technical error is the author's.

Autumn Writers Workshop

Marygrove College

Detroit, Michigan

The Subject Is Murder

“Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction.”—Pascal

A Seminar Workshop on the Role of Religion in Murder Mysteries

Marygrove College

Sept. 4–8, 1989

Mystery novels are currently enjoying a renaissance unmatched in history. Add to mystery the element of religion and we have a match made in heaven (or hell). The root word for mystery means “that which is hidden.” St. Thomas Aquinas says there are two absolute mysteries in Christianity: the mystery of the Incarnation and the mystery of the Trinity.

None of our faculty would dispute St. Thomas regarding the possibility of an absolute mystery. But they will lead us through mysteries that have solutions, with sleuths (albeit fictional) who unravel the puzzles of murder most foul. Depending on which of our faculty is writing, the sleuth may be a priest, a monk, a rabbi, or a nun. But with a religious background and motif, the mystery, in a certain sense, has “come home.”

Our goals are the same as they have been for all our previous workshops: to provide information, inspiration, instruction, and encouragement for all writers—published or unpublished.

Our featured speaker is the noted televangelist and successful publisher, Klaus Krieg. Our four faculty members are all published mystery authors.

Whether or not your field is the religious mystery novel, you cannot help gaining valuable insight into the publishing world from those already successful in this field.

Learn how to attract an agent, find a publisher,

write the query letter; how to recognize "boilerplate" pitfalls in contractual language; the dangers in self-publishing; the vagaries of pub dates, and how to promote the finished product.

All this in addition to an introduction to the religious mystery novel by those who understand it inside and out.

Featured Speakers:

Klaus Krieg, Founder of P.G. Press, and internationally famous evangelist of the P.G. Television Network.

Rev. David Benbow, Rector of St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Chicago, Illinois, and author of three novels. The latest: Father Emrich and the Reluctant Convert.

Sister Marie Monahan, IHM, Director of Continuing Education for the Archdiocese of Miami, Florida, and author of Behind the Veil.

Rev. Augustine May, OCSO, Trappist of St. Francis Abbey, Wellesley, Massachusetts, and author of A Rose by Any Other Name, as well as many articles in monastic publications.

Irving Winter, Rabbi of Congregation Beth Shalom, Windsor, Ontario, Canada, author of a series of mystery novels from which the popular "Rabbi" television series has been adapted.

1 “WHAT THE HELL is this doing here?”

Father Ed Sklarski glanced around the large room, but got no answer from the sprinkling of relaxing priests. No response forthcoming, he tried a slightly different tack. “Who brought this here?”

Father Jim Tracy looked up from the book he was reading. “What is it?”

Sklarski rattled the heavy stock paper. “I don’t know. I just found it on the table here. Some sort of brochure. From Marygrove. A writers’ conference or something. Something about religion and murder mysteries.”

“If it’s about religion, it’s in the right place here.” Tracy smiled and returned to his book.

Sklarski, with nothing better to do at the moment, read on silently from the artsy pamphlet.

Sklarski, feeling a little mid-afternoon numbness, decided to make himself a drink. He glanced at the bar. Plenty of scotch; no hurry. He studied the brochure more carefully. To no one in particular he said, “Who are those people, anyway? I don’t recognize anybody but that jerk, Krieg. Does more damage than an army of goddam devils.”

Tracy had been paying only marginal attention. At that, it

was more advertence than anyone else in the room was giving Sklarski. "Krieg? The television producer? What about him?" Tracy asked.

Sklarski pointed to the name, a useless gesture. "Says he's going to be featured at this workshop at Marygrove."

"Really!" Tracy lowered the book and removed his bifocals. "That's odd, even for a relevant place like Marygrove. Who else is on the list?" Sklarski focused with some difficulty. "Um . . . David Benbow, Anglican . . ."

"Mystery writer," Tracy identified.

"Marie Monahan, a nun . . ."

"Mystery writer."

"Huh! Augustine May, a Trappist . . ."

"All of them, eh?"

"And Irving Winer. A rabbi, would you believe?"

"You must know him," Tracy said. "That TV series on Sunday nights is based on his books."

"The one about the rabbi?"

"Uh-huh."

"Now that you mention it. But . . . you know all these people?"

"They're all mystery writers. They all have religious sleuths that correspond to themselves. The priest has a priest sleuth, the nun, a nun; the Trappist, a monk, the rabbi, a rabbi. It's quite a good idea, really, if you want to follow the dictum, 'Go with what you know.' "

Incredulity was evident in Sklarski's expression. "You mean you've read them all?"

Tracy smiled. "I haven't read Monahan yet. But the others? Yes."

Sklarski slowly shook his head. "What is it with you? All

you ever do is read books. God! How many books can you read? There're only twenty-six letters in the alphabet!"

Tracy chuckled and returned to his present book.

Sklarski, while continuing to read the brochure, moved to the bar, where he selected the one glass that, by common consent, was reserved for his use and his alone. It was never washed.

"Aha!" There was triumph in Sklarski's voice.

The other priests gave him their startled attention. It was at this moment that Sklarski blew the cobwebs out of his glass and splashed in a bit of scotch. Sklarski's routine constituted an act of faith in the antiseptic powers of alcohol.

"Aha!" Sklarski repeated. "Now we have it. Here's the reason. That's why this pamphlet is here." No one asked what that reason might be, so Sklarski, pointing at the revelatory line, continued. "See here? It says: Resource person: Father Robert Koesler, whose religious background and periodic contact with the Homicide Division of Detroit's Police Department will provide valuable authentication to our workshop.

"Where is he?" Sklarski bellowed. "I saw Koesler a little while ago. He must have brought this thing with him. Where is he?"

Actually, if Father Robert Koesler had been closer to the Paternoster clubhouse, he could have heard Sklarski easily. But, as it was, Koesler was communing with nature close by on the Lake St. Clair shoreline.

For some time, Koesler, albeit somewhat absently, studied the ground. At length, he selected a flat stone, then skipped it over the barely undulating water.

Six skips. Not bad, but hardly championship caliber.

He inhaled deeply. The air was undoubtedly polluted; wasn't everything? But, somehow, with no factory or other industrial complex in sight, on a clear brisk September afternoon, at the shore of this pleasant adjunct of the majestic Great Lakes, everything seemed salubrious.

However, as pleasant as it was here, he had no intention of joining the Paternoster Club. His duties, as well as his priorities, were too demanding to make practical such an investment of time and money. He was there this day as a guest of his friend and classmate Father Patrick McNiff, whom a parishioner had once accurately described as "somewhat stuffy but never uninteresting."

Founded in the early fifties by and for priests, the club was intended as a facility for R, R & R: rest, relaxation, and reflection—to which could be added retreat. In the early sixties, the membership had peaked at sixty. Now, thanks to the clergy shortage, it was approximately half that.

Located in Ontario, northeast of Windsor near Stoney Point, the club's spacious cabin sits on ten acres of land at the tip of a peninsula embraced on three sides by Lake St. Clair and a man-made canal.

Koesler selected a thinner, flatter stone. Four skips. He would not be entering any competition.

If I shot an arrow, thought Koesler, it wouldn't go very far. But if it were to hit U.S. land on the other side of the lake—out of sight of this spot—it most likely would hit Harsens Island. That was home to Ed Sklarski, now retired—or who, in popular parlance, had achieved Senior Priest status.

Koesler shook his head. Senior Priest status was one of the many fruits of the Second Vatican Council. Before Vatican II, in the early sixties, priests just did not retire. They died, like as not, on a Saturday afternoon while hearing kids'

confessions, halfway through an absolution, bored to death. Somehow, it all seemed more appropriate—dying in the saddle, as it were.

Now there was mandatory retirement at age seventy. Retirement to what? The priest had no wife to live out with him “the Golden Years.” No family with whom to visit or to invite home. Today’s Senior Priest might move to a warmer climate, there to vegetate. Or hang in there doing whatever parish chores he chose. What with the vocations crisis, priestly retirement was a luxury the Church could ill afford.

Koesler hunched his shoulders. Was it getting cold?

He was beginning to develop a philosophy that “nothing is as good as it was.” Not the music, not the movies, not the newspapers; not entertainment, not cars, not pride in workmanship, not anything. Well, if he was developing into a full-fledged curmudgeon, he was of an age at which it seemed appropriate.

He walked along the beach, almost mesmerized by the rhythmic lapping of the waves.

On another, brighter aspect, he reflected, this was just about his favorite season, autumn. And it was just beginning now, a bit ahead of time, on the second day of September. The sun had already begun to tilt from its directly overhead summertime course. There was a nip in the air. Footballs were flying. Baseball was nearing the home stretch. Soon the leaves would display their breathtaking colors.

The only fly he could discern in the present ointment was the commitment he had made to that blasted writers’ workshop.

Bob Koesler was forever repeating that same blunder: accepting invitations to events many months in the future. In analyzing his own pattern, it seemed that when invited to

participate in something in the distant future, he would convince himself that it was so far off that it would never happen. Or that perhaps in the meantime he would die.

In any case, there was no getting around this one. The panel of experts (or "faculty" as they were called) would assemble tomorrow at Marygrove. And he would be there with them.

Apart from having become a conscientious reader of mystery novels, he could think of no reason why he should be a "resource person." True, he had had some small contact with Detroit's Homicide Department. But that had been quite fortuitous. The Fickle Finger of Fate, as the late lamented TV program, "Laugh-In" put it. It was a case of his being at the right—or wrong—place at the right—or wrong—time, depending on how one looked at it.

He had been of some small help in solving a few cases in the past. But that had not been due to any native expertise in crime detection on his part. No, all the cases he'd been involved with had a religious, mostly Catholic, element. So he had been able to supply the missing church ingredient needed in the resolution of such investigation. Now that he considered his present involvement, he could not imagine why he had ever accepted this invitation.

The only consolation—and it was not inconsiderable—was the prospect of his meeting the four authors.

Koesler had a special regard for writers. He had read at least one offering of each author on the panel. It was something like experiencing a Dick Francis novel. Francis had been a successful jockey. And, regularly, the race track provided the background for his plots. Thus, in addition to providing a pleasant diversion, a Francis book was more than likely to give one added insight into the racing game.

So it was with the present four. And it wasn't only that theirs was a religious background, but that their backgrounds were so diverse. Besides the entertainment and the mystery, the reader got an insight into the specialized world of an Episcopal (and married) priest, or the drastically changed nun's world, or life in a cloistered world, or the world of the Jewish culture, so filled with tradition and law.

Koesler was, of course, steeped in the unique lifestyle of the Roman Catholic priest. With his express interest in religion, he found fulfilling the revelations the others provided. He was eager to meet them.

He was less than enthusiastic about being made available as a "resource person." Especially since he sincerely felt he had little to offer. But he had agreed to do it. So, ready or not, here he came.

Koesler realized that he was shivering ever so slightly. He checked his watch. It was getting late. The imminence of sundown, plus the breeze from the lake, must have lowered the temperature.

Quiet, undisturbed moments were rare and such time passed quickly. He would have to collect McNiff and head home. Both of them had Saturday evening, as well as Sunday, liturgies to offer.

He turned and walked toward the cabin.

Around this time tomorrow he would be preparing to go to Marygrove and meet his fellow participants in the workshop. His final thought on the matter concerned Klaus Krieg. The one who, in Koesler's view, did not fit.

Krieg was a publisher, not an author. That part was all right; writers would be pretty lonely people without publishers. It wasn't that a publisher, as such, was out of place at such a conference. It was the stuff that Krieg published. In

Koesler's view. P.G.'s publications were simply not in the same literary league as the material turned out by these authors.

It was obvious that P.G. Press made money—lots of it. But then, someone once said that no one had ever gone broke by underestimating the taste of the American public. Klaus Krieg might not have been the original author of that aphorism, but he certainly seemed to bear it out. In all honesty, Koesler had to admit that his knowledge of the quality of Krieg's entrepreneurial empire was largely secondhand. Koesler had read only one book published by P.G. Press. The setting had been New York's Catholic Church. And if the story had been anywhere near true, most New York parishes would have been forced to close: There wouldn't have been any priests around to say Mass or hear confessions, let alone administer a parish. According to that book, most New York priests were in bed pretty much around the clock, and hardly alone.

It wasn't just that the book needlessly and gratuitously debased the priesthood—although that was bad enough. Women, in the book, were depicted as kittenish creatures curled in sacerdotal arms, and grateful in a depraved way for the macho favors they had been granted.

Once he was sure the book could not possibly have been salvaged by a single redeeming feature, Koesler had put it—and all future P.G. books—aside forever. From reports he'd received from others, and from reviews and news articles he'd read, he had concluded that his experience with P.G. was by no means isolated.

P.G. Press was giving both religious and romance novels a very bad name. But from all indications, P.G. Press was making money—lots of it.

And that was not even the half of it. The greater money-making venture, by far, was the Praise God Network. Klaus Krieg was among the foremost of the current crop of televangelists—once again, as far as Koesler was concerned, giving religion a very bad reputation.

All in all, he was not yearning to meet Klaus Krieg. Or, as he was sometimes disrespectfully referred to by some of the media, “Blitz” Krieg—German for “lightning war.”

Nor could Koesler guess what had motivated the organizers of this workshop to include Krieg. Those writers who had such an evident respect and reverence for religion really had nothing in common with Krieg except the most tenuous connection with some sort of religious expression. How would or could they relate to such a person?

Koesler did not fancy confrontations. And he had the clear premonition he was walking right into a classic showdown.

But here he was at the cabin. He entered to find almost everyone in helpless laughter. The only one who seemed not to be getting the joke was Koesler’s host, Patrick McNiff. McNiff seemed bewildered.

Sklarski, the first to show signs of recovery, gasped, “Tell him . . . tell Koesler what you just said.”

“What’s so funny about it?” McNiff was obviously flustered. “I don’t see anything so funny about it.”

“Tell him,” Sklarski urged.

“Wait,” Tracy interrupted, “we’ve got to set it up. It’s no good without the setup.”

Sensing he was the butt of a joke, a joke he didn’t get, McNiff showed clear signs of increasing anger.

“I woke him up just before you came in,” Sklarski said to Koesler. “I asked him why he bothered coming all the way over to Canada just to sleep all afternoon. Then . . .”

he turned back to the baffled man, “what did you say, McNiff?”

McNiff was gathering his belongings—a book, a couple of magazines, an electric shaver—and slamming them into a duffel bag. “I don’t remember.” He was turning defensive.

“Come on, why did you sleep all afternoon?”

“Because I’ve got a cold,” McNiff tried tentatively. He wasn’t sure whether it was this statement that the others had found humorous. It was something he’d said, he just wasn’t sure what. No one laughed. This wasn’t it.

“So,” Sklarski pursued, “what do you do when you’ve got a cold?”

“Actually, I haven’t got a cold. I’m coming down with one.”

“Okay,” Sklarski was getting impatient, “what do you do when you’re coming down with a cold?”

“Go to bed.”

“That’s not what you said.”

By process of elimination, McNiff concluded, the second part of his statement had to be it. “I don’t remember.” He would not play the fool. Not knowingly, at any rate.

Koesler looked inquiringly at Sklarski. It was evident McNiff was not about to cooperate. It was also evident that Sklarski would not let him off the hook.

“You said,” Sklarski supplied, “that whenever you were coming down with a cold, you always tried to curl up on a couch for a few hours with an African.”

Laughter renewed.

McNiff’s eyes darted confusedly from one to another of his confreres. “It helps,” he explained in bewilderment.

“I’ll bet.” Sklarski guffawed, and spilled his drink.

“C’m on,” Koesler said, “it’s getting late.” On the way