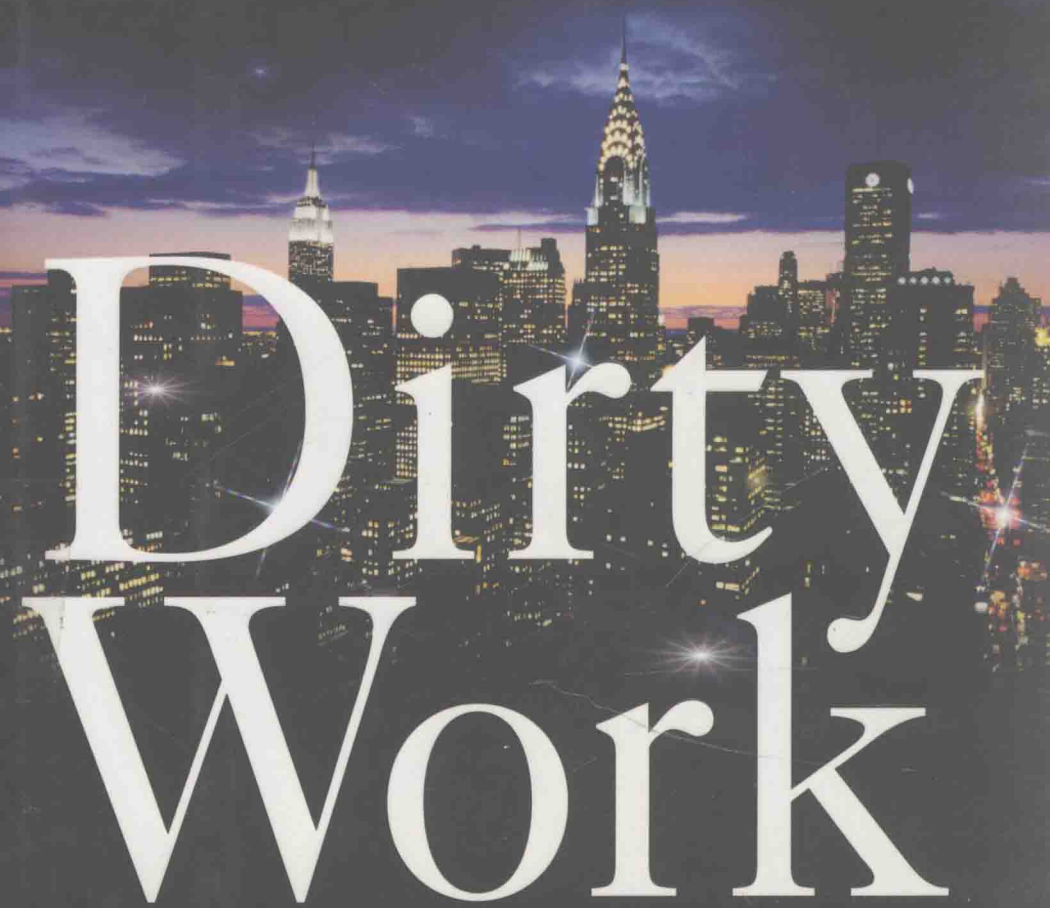
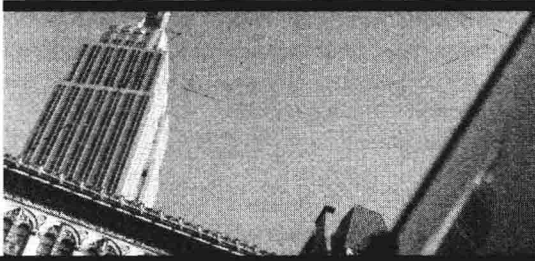


STUART WOODS

A STONE BARRINGTON NOVEL

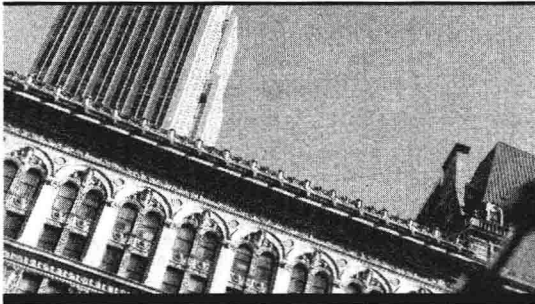


Dirty Work



DIRTY WORK

STUART WOODS



G. P. Putnam's Sons NEW YORK

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

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1

ELAINE'S, LATE.

A big night—a couple of directors, a couple of movie stars, half a dozen writers, an assortment of journalists, editors, publicists, cops, wise guys, drunks, hangers-on, women of substance, and some of considerably less substance. And this was just at the tables; the bar was a whole other thing.

Stone Barrington pushed his plate away and sat back. Gianni, the waiter, snatched it away.

“Was it all right?” Gianni asked.

“You see anything left?” Stone asked.

Gianni grinned and took the plate to the kitchen.

Elaine came over and sat down. “So?” she said. She did not light a cigarette. To Stone’s continuing astonishment, she had quit, cold turkey.

“Not much,” Stone replied.

“That’s what you always say,” Elaine said.

“I’m not kidding, not much is happening.”

The front door of the restaurant opened, and Bill Eggers came in.



"Now something's happening," Elaine said. "Eggers never comes in here unless he's looking for you, and he never looks for you unless there's trouble."

"You wrong the man," Stone said, waving Eggers over to the table, but he knew she was right. For ordinary work, Bill phoned; for more pressing tasks, he hunted down Stone and usually found him at Elaine's.

"Good evening, Elaine, Stone," Eggers said. "Your cell phone is off."

"It didn't work, did it?" Stone replied.

"I gotta be someplace," Elaine said, getting up and walking away. She got as far as the next table.

"Drink?" Stone asked.

Michael, the headwaiter, materialized beside them.

"Johnnie Walker Black, rocks," Eggers said.

"I have a feeling I'm going to need a Wild Turkey," Stone said to Michael.

Michael vanished.

"How's it going?" Eggers asked.

"You tell me," Stone said.

Eggers shrugged.

"If I had to guess," Stone said, "I'd say, not so hot."

"Oh, it's not so bad," Eggers replied.

"Then what drags you away from home and hearth, into this den of iniquity?"

"You remember that big Irish ex-cop, used to do little chores for you from time to time?"

"Teddy? He dropped dead in P. J. Clarke's three months ago."

"From what?"

"How many things can an Irishman in an Irish bar drop dead of?" Stone asked, rhetorically.

"Yeah," Eggers admitted.

"And why would I need somebody like Teddy?" Stone asked.

"You remember telling me about that thing Teddy used to do with the water pistol?" Eggers asked.

"You mean, after he kicked down a door and had his camera ready, how he squirted his naked subjects down low, so they'd grab at themselves and leave their faces open to be photographed in bed with each other?"

Eggers chuckled. "That's the one. I admire that kind of ingenuity."

The drinks came, and they both sipped for a long, contemplative moment.

"So, you're in need of that kind of ingenuity?" Stone asked at last.

"You remember that prenup I tossed you last year?" Eggers asked. Bill Eggers was the managing partner of Woodman & Weld, the very prestigious New York law firm to which Stone was of counsel, which meant he sometimes did the work that Woodman & Weld did not wish to appear to be doing.

"Elena Marks?" Stone asked.

"The very one."

"I remember." Elena Marks was heiress to a department store fortune, and she had married a member in high standing of the No Visible Means of Support Club.

"You remember that funny little clause you wrote into her prenup?"

"You mean the one about how if Larry got caught with his pants around his ankles in the company of a lady other than Elena, he would forfeit any claim to her assets or income?" Lawrence Fortescue was English—handsome, well educated, and possessed of every social grace, which meant he didn't have a receptacle in which to relieve himself.

"The very one," Eggers said.

"Has Larry been a bad boy?" Stone asked.

"Has been, is, and will continue to be," Eggers replied, sipping his Scotch.

"I see," Stone said.

"Now that Teddy has gone to his reward, who do you use for that sort of thing?"

"It's been quite a while since that sort of thing was required of me," Stone replied edgily.

"Don't take that tone with me, young man," Eggers said, raising himself erect in mock dudgeon. "It's work, and somebody has to do it."

Stone sighed. "I suppose I could find somebody."

Eggers looked at him sharply. "You're not thinking of doing this yourself, are you? I mean, there are heights involved here, and you're not as young as you used to be."

"I am *not* thinking of doing it myself, but I'm certainly in good enough shape to," Stone said. "What kind of heights are we talking about?"

"The roof of a six-story town house, shooting through a conveniently located skylight."

"There is no such thing as a conveniently located skylight, if you're the one doing the climbing," Stone said.

"You'd need someone . . . s pry," Eggers said, "and the term hardly applies to the cops and ex-cops you mingle with."

At that moment, as if to make Eggers's point, Stone's former partner from his NYPD days, Dino Bacchetti, walked through the front door and headed for Stone's table.

"If you see what I mean," Eggers said.

Stone held up a hand, stopping Dino in his tracks, then a finger, turning him toward the bar.

"I get your point," Stone said. "I'll see who I can come up with."

"You don't have a lot of time," Eggers said. "It's at nine o'clock tomorrow night."

"What's at nine o'clock tomorrow night?"

"The assignation. Larry Fortescue has an appointment with a masseuse who, I understand, routinely massages more than his neck muscles. Elena would like some very clear photographs of that service being performed."

"Let me see what I can do," Stone said.

Eggers tossed off the remainder of his Scotch and placed a folded sheet of paper on the table. "I knew you would grasp the nettle," he said, standing up. "The address of the building is on the paper. I'll need the prints and negatives by noon the day after tomorrow."

"What's the rush?"

"Elena Marks is accustomed to instant gratification."

"But not from Larry?"

"You *are* quick, Stone. Nighty-night." He slapped Dino on the back as he passed the bar on his way to the door.

Dino came over, licking Scotch off his hand, where Eggers had spilled it. He flopped into a chair. "So what was that about?" he asked, pointing his chin at Eggers's disappearing back.

"Dirty work," Stone said.



2

DINO PATTED THE REST OF THE SPILLED Scotch off his hand with a cocktail napkin. "Is there any other kind?"

"Sure there is, and they give me plenty of it," Stone said defensively.

"How dirty?"

"Just slightly grubby; I don't have to kill anybody."

"And who are you going to get to do it?"

"Well, Teddy's dead, so I guess I'd better call Bob Cantor," Stone said, digging out his cell phone and switching it on.

"Bob's your man, as well as your uncle," Dino observed.

Stone dialed the number and got a recording. He left a message, then dialed Cantor's cell phone.

It was answered instantly. "Speak to me!" Cantor's voice shouted over a babble of voices and steel-band music.

"It's Stone. Where the hell are you?"

"Saint Thomas, baby!" Cantor yelled.

"Like in the Virgin Islands, Saint Thomas?"



"I'm not talking about the church."

"Bob, I need some help. Are you sober?"

"Certainly not! I've had enough piña coladas to fill that hot tub at your house."

"It's not a hot tub; it's just a big bathtub with the Jacuzzi thing."

"Whatever. Why don't you come down here, Stone? You wouldn't believe the women."

"I'd believe them."

"What d'ya need, that you would interrupt a man's drinking?"

Stone looked around and cupped a hand over the cell phone. "I need a second-story man who's good with a camera."

"You running a badger game?"

"Close, but not quite. And the shots have to be taken on a roof, so I need somebody who's in good enough shape not to fall off the building and embarrass everybody."

"Got a pencil?"

Stone dug out a pen. "Shoot."

"Herbie Fisher."

"Who's he?"

"My sister's boy. He's young and bold and agile, and he's a pretty good photographer."

"The light may not be very good."

"It never is in those situations, is it?"

"Right."

Cantor gave Stone the number, and he wrote it on a cocktail napkin. "Tell him I sent you and not to screw it up."

"Does he make a habit of screwing up?" Stone asked. But Cantor had punched off and returned to his piña coladas.

"I heard that," Dino said, "but I didn't hear it."

"Good," Stone said, punching in the number Cantor had given him. The phone rang five times before it was picked up.

"What!" a young man's voice said, panting.

"Herbie Fisher?"

"Who wants to know? Jesus, can't a guy get laid anymore?"

"My name is Stone Barrington. Your uncle Bob said to call you."

"Gimme your number, I got something to finish here."

Stone gave him the number, and he hung up.

"I think I interrupted him," Stone said.

"In the saddle?"

"That's what it sounded like."

"These kids!" Dino said, laughing. "Nobody would ever have caught you or me doing that."

"Nah," Stone agreed. Then he looked toward the door and froze. "Look over your shoulder and tell me if I'm seeing what I think I'm seeing," he said.

Dino looked over his shoulder. "Carpenter!"

She was standing there in a beautiful cashmere coat that set off her dark brown hair, looking around, looking lost; she hadn't seen him. Stone grabbed Michael, the headwaiter, as he passed. "The lady at the door," Stone said. "Go over there and say, 'Miss Carpenter? Mr. Barrington is expecting you.' Then bring her here."

Michael nodded and went to his work. Stone watched her face; no sign of surprise. Carpenter had never given much away. Michael led her back toward the table, and Stone and Dino stood up.

"What took you so long?" Stone said, embracing her and kissing her on the cheek.

"I came as fast as I could," she said, her British accent smooth and creamy. "Dino, how are you?" She hugged him.

"Better now," Dino said.

Stone took her coat, hung it up, and held a chair for her, then he sat down and waved Michael over again. "What would you like to drink, Carpenter?" He didn't know her first name, nor her last name,

for that matter. Carpenter was a handle, a moniker, a code name. They had met in London the year before, when he had gotten himself into a mess that required the assistance of British intelligence. Dino had been there, too.

"Bourbon, please," she said, "no ice."

"You get that, Michael?"

Michael nodded and went away.

"Since when does a limey girl drink bourbon?" Dino asked.

"Since Stone extolled its virtues," she replied. A glass was set before her, and she sipped appreciatively.

"And what brings you to New York?" Stone asked. "Besides me, I mean."

"Well," she said drolly, "you were the most important consideration, of course, but there is a little job I have to do with an agency of your government that will require every waking moment that I can tear myself away from your presence."

"I'll see that there are not many of those moments," Stone said. "Dare I ask which agency of my government?"

"The FBI," she said.

"Oh, yes, they would be the folks who are roughly analogous to your own outfit, wouldn't they?"

"Perhaps," she said coolly.

"C'mon, Stone, she's not going to tell you anything," Dino said.

Elaine came back and pulled up a chair.

"Elaine Kaufman," Stone said, "let me introduce . . ." He waited for Carpenter to fill in the blank.

"Felicity," Carpenter said, offering her hand to Elaine and shooting Stone an amused glance.

"Really?" Stone asked.

"Sometimes," Carpenter replied.

Stone's cell phone rang.

3

STONE STOOD UP. "EXCUSE ME FOR A MOMENT," he said to Carpenter. He walked toward the kitchen and turned into the empty dining room that Elaine used for parties and overflow. "Hello?"

"This is Herbie Fisher. You called?"

"Yeah, I spoke to your uncle Bob a few minutes ago, and he recommended you for a job."

"What kind of job?"

"It involves a camera."

"I'm up for photography," Herbie said. "Tell me more."

"The job's tomorrow evening, so clear your schedule. Come to my office tomorrow morning at ten." Stone gave him the address. "It's the professional entrance of the house, lower level."

"What's it pay?"

"I'll talk to you tomorrow morning." Stone hung up and went back to his table. Elaine had moved on to somebody else's.

"Late date?" Carpenter asked.

"Business," Stone said.



"Ah, business."

"How long are you in town for?"

"A few days, unless I can think of a reason to stretch my stay."

Dino stood up. "I'll leave you two to work on some reasons."

"Good night, Dino," she said. "I hope I'll see you again while I'm here."

"Count on it," Dino said, then he left.

"Sweet man," Carpenter said.

"If you say so. Felicity, huh? I like it."

"It's just as well; I'm not going to change it."

"Have you had dinner?"

"I had a business dinner earlier."

"Where are you staying?"

"With friends."

"Where, with friends?"

"In the East Forties."

"Very near me. Will you come to my house for a nightcap?"

"All right."

They got into their coats and, outside, Stone started to hail a cab.

"Don't," she said. "I have a car, courtesy of my firm." She nodded toward a black Lincoln idling at the curb.

"All the better," Stone said, opening the door for her. He gave the driver his address.

"That's in Turtle Bay," she said.

"You know Turtle Bay?"

"I can read a map and a guidebook, I know all about it. Does your house open onto the common garden?"

"Yes, it does."

"Perhaps you'll show me the garden tomorrow."

"Certainly," Stone replied, though he wasn't quite sure what she meant.

"How does one afford a house of one's own, what with property prices the way they are in New York these days?"

"Easy. One has a great-aunt who dies and wills him the house. Then one works one's ass off renovating it."

"I can't wait to see it."

"You don't have to wait, we're here." He opened the door, and she slid across the seat. She leaned back into the car. "You can go," she said to the driver.

Stone liked the sound of that. He led her up the steps, unlocked the front door, and hung their coats in the front hall closet. "I didn't know you had any friends in New York," he said.

"Business friends."

"Oh. And I suppose their front hall closet has a selection of cloaks and daggers."

"Quite," she said.

Stone switched on some lights from the master panel in the foyer.

Carpenter walked into the living room. "This is very handsome," she said. "Did you choose the furniture, or did you have a designer?"

"Most of the furniture came with the house. I had everything reupholstered. I chose the fabrics."

"Oh? I thought I detected a woman's touch."

Stone didn't want to go there. "My study is through here," he said, leading the way.

"Beautiful paneling and bookcases," Carpenter said.

"My father designed and built them."

"Your father the Communist?"

"Ex-Communist," Stone replied. "You pulled a few files on me, didn't you?"

"A few. Mother, a painter. Both parents disowned by their parents, who were textile tycoons in New England. Why?"

"My father, because of his politics; my mother, because she married my father. The only family member who spoke to them was my great-aunt. She bought this house and hired my father to do a lot of the interior. It kept them from starving to death, early in their marriage. What else did you learn about me?"

"Went to New York University, then the law school. Joined the NYPD afterwards, served fourteen years, including eleven as a detective. Retired for medical reasons, ostensibly. A bullet in the knee, wasn't it?"

"Yes, but there were other, more political reasons. The department was never very comfortable with me."

"You must tell me about it when we have more time," she said.

"Don't we have time now?"

"Not really. Where is your bedroom?"

He led her up a flight. "Right here."

She began unbuttoning her suit coat. "I think we'd better get to bed," she said. "I have an early meeting tomorrow morning."

Stone stood, stunned, his mouth open.

She reached over and closed it, then kissed him lightly. "You mustn't believe everything you hear about proper British girls," she said, working on his buttons.

"I must remember that," he said, helping her.

Stone woke with the gray light of dawn coming through the windows overlooking the garden. He could hear the shower running. He got up, found a robe, brushed his hair, and was about to go and find her when she came out of the bathroom, wearing his terrycloth robe, her face shiny with no makeup.

"Good morning," she said. "You were very good last night."

"Why, thank you," he said.

"It's interesting how you talk during sex," she said. "Englishmen never do that."

"No?"

"No, they always seem in such a hurry. You, on the other hand, took your time, and I liked that."

"You are a very big surprise, Felicity."

"Oh, I hope so," she replied. "If I hadn't been, my carefully composed professional mien would have been compromised."

He put his arms around her. "I assure you, it was not. As I said, you were a very big surprise."

She picked up her watch from his dresser top. "I think we may have time to do it again," she said. "Are you up for that?"

"I'm getting there," Stone said.