

STUART WOODS

BLOOD ORCHID





Blood Orchid

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Blood Orchid

Also by Stuart Woods

FICTION

*The Short Forever**

Orchid Blues

*Cold Paradise**

*L.A. Dead**

The Run

*Worst Fears Realized**

Orchid Beach

*Swimming to Catalina**

*Dead in the Water**

*Dirt**

Choke

Imperfect Strangers

Heat

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Under the Lake

Deep Lie

Run Before the Wind

Chiefs

TRAVEL

*A Romantic's Guide to the
Country Inns of Britain and
Ireland (1978)*

MEMOIR

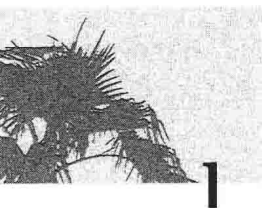
Blue Water, Green Skipper

*A Stone Barrington book

STUART WOODS



This book is for Bob and Kay Falise.



Sara Tennant arrived at her office building in downtown Miami promptly at seven forty-five A.M., as was her habit. She needed only to park her car and use the private elevator to the penthouse suite of Jimenez Properties; she would be at her desk in the little office next to that of her boss, Manuel Jimenez, when he arrived, promptly at eight o'clock, as was his habit.

As she parked her new Toyota Avalon in the reserved space, next to that of her boss, she was surprised and not a little annoyed to see that his Mercedes was already in its spot. She was going to have to start coming in earlier, she thought; she couldn't have Manny getting there before she did.

There was something odd about the Mercedes, she realized, through the fog of her recent sleep. Until she had her morning coffee, a double espresso, she would not think quickly. She sat in the Toyota with the motor still running while she tried to figure it out.

The lights, she decided. The interior lights of the Mercedes were on, and unless she turned them off, Manny would soon have a dead battery. She gathered her small briefcase, purse, coffee thermos, and the *Miami Herald* and struggled out of her car. She set her things down on the driver's seat and smoothed her skirt before continuing. She was looking forward to reading Carl Hiassen's column in the paper before doing any real work. She loved Hiassen, read all his novels, too, and never missed his column.

She gathered her things once again, closed the car door, and pressed the button on the remote control to lock all the doors and the trunk. Some cars had been broken into in this garage, in spite of the security cameras. She wished Manny had sprung for a garage with a manned entrance, instead of the electronic surveillance; a guard on duty made her feel safer. Embracing her belongings, she walked around Manny's car and saw immediately why the interior lights were on: the driver's door was open. She took another step or two, reaching out for the door, then she peered over the things in her arms and saw what they had concealed until now.

Manny Jimenez was lying on the garage floor in an oddly contorted position.

Heart attack! Sara thought immediately. She had taken a CPR course at her church, and she knew exactly what to do. She put her things on the garage floor, reached out to Manny, and turned him over. Manny had not had a heart attack. A heart attack did not put a hole in his head, and particularly, did not spray his blood and brains across the inside of the Mercedes door. Sara did not pause to take Manny's pulse or put her ear to his chest. He was stiff as a board, and she knew what that meant. She picked up her things and ran for the elevator. As soon as she had opened the door with her key, she was digging in her briefcase for her cellphone.

Steven Steinberg stood on the eighteenth tee of the Doral Country Club's famous course, the Blue Monster, and gazed down the fairway, utterly relaxed and confident. He had played this schmuck from New York like a violin, and now he was going to take his money. Even though Steinberg had an official handicap of six, and even though he should have carried a card that said three, he had allowed his guest to play him neck and neck for seventeen holes. They were now tied at eleven over par, and it was time to crank the handle on the cash register.

Steinberg took his stance, his right foot back a couple of extra inches, and without a practice swing, hit the ball. It started to the right, then turned over and dropped into the middle of the fairway, two hundred and seventy yards down the course.

Fleischman stared after the ball with an expression of disbelief on his face.

"Something wrong?" Steinberg asked.

"Nothing at all," Fleischman replied, teeing up. He swung mightily at the ball and sliced it into a fairway bunker, two hundred and twenty yards down the fairway. He picked up his tee. "So how come, all of a sudden, after seventeen holes, you're outdriving me?"

Steinberg shrugged. "Every now and then I really connect. Don't you, sometimes?"

"Sometimes," Fleischman said. "But not usually on the eighteenth, and not for that kind of length."

They got into Steinberg's customized golf cart. "You know what I'd do if I were you?" he said to his guest.

"No, Steven, what would you do?"

"I'd take a seven wood and go for it."

"Out of a bunker?"

"Why not? It's a shallow bunker; there's enough loft on a seven wood to carry the edge, and you'd find yourself a nice little wedge from the flag. You got a seven wood? You want to borrow mine?" At this stage, he could afford to appear to be generous.

"I've got a seven wood," Fleischman said as the cart drew to a halt next to the bunker. He looked down the fairway toward the flag, checked the depth of the bunker, and pulled his seven wood from his bag.

"Come on," Steinberg said, "you can do it."

Fleischman lined up his shot. "Keep it smooth," he muttered to himself. "Nice easy shot." He swung the club and connected beautifully with the ball. It faded a little but dropped in the fairway, maybe eighty yards from the pin.

"Great shot!" Steinberg said.

"Thanks for the tip," Fleischman replied, getting into the cart.

They stopped next to Steinberg's ball. He didn't even glance down the fairway, just went to his bag and came back with a fairway wood.

"What are you doing with that club?" Fleischman asked. "It's only a hundred and sixty yards to the flag; you'll knock it into the next county."

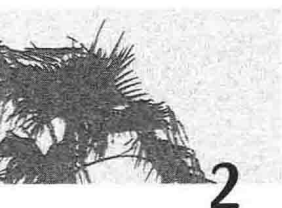
"This is an eleven wood," Steinberg replied, lining up on the ball. He relaxed, took a breath and let it out, and took a slow-looking, liquid swing at the ball. It rose high into the air, sailed down the fairway, past the guarding bunkers, and dropped onto the green with only a single bounce, stopping four feet from the pin.

"I'm getting one of those," Fleischman muttered.

"You should," Steinberg replied, still holding his finish.

Then Steinberg's head exploded.

For a tiny second before he screamed, Fleischman wondered if cheating at golf could make your head explode.



Holly Barker walked into the Ocean Grill in Vero Beach and looked around for her father. Nowhere in sight. She looked at her watch; okay, she was ten minutes early, and Ham was always exactly on time.

"Hi, Holly," the woman at the headwaiter's station said. "How many tonight?"

"Just two," Holly replied. "Ham ought to be here in a few minutes. Tell him I'm in the bar."

"Right. I ought to have a table in twenty minutes or so."

The Ocean Grill didn't take reservations, so Holly always came early. One side of the bar was empty, so she plopped down on a stool there.

"What'll it be?" the bartender asked.

"A three-to-one vodka gimlet, straight up, shaken, very cold."

"Make that two," a man's voice said from behind her, and someone took a seat two stools down. "My favorite," he said to Holly.

Jackson had been dead for nearly a year, but Holly still wasn't ready to be hit on. She half-turned toward the stranger and nodded. She wasn't getting into a conversation. Then she relaxed. He was sixtyish and well preserved, at that. He was beautifully, if casually dressed in a blue blazer, gray trousers, black alligator loafers, and what looked like a silk shirt, pale yellow and open at the collar. A pocket square that matched the shirt peeped from his breast pocket.

"It's a wonderful drink," she said, comfortable talking to someone who was so much older than she, and who, into the bargain, was quite handsome—tall, slim, tanned, and with thick, perfectly white hair, well cut.

"I've never understood the charm of martinis," he said, "except that they look so wonderful. A gimlet gives you the aesthetic reward of the martini, without having to drink it. Three-to-one is just right, too; bartenders never measure, and they always put too much vodka in a gimlet." He glanced at the bartender, who pretended not to be listening. The man picked up a jigger and started measuring.

"Yep," Holly said, "you have to train your bartender to do it right."

The bartender set two frosted martini glasses on the bar, shook the cocktail shaker for half a minute, then strained the pale, green liquid into the two glasses, decorating each with a slice of lime. "Try that," he said.

Holly and the man raised their glasses to each other and sipped.

"You've earned your tip," the man said to the bartender.

"You certainly have," Holly echoed.

The man stuck out his hand. "I'm Ed Shine," he said, "like the shine on your shoes."

Holly took the hand. "Holly Barker."

"From Vero?"

Holly shook her head. "Orchid Beach, up the road."

"Really? Me too, for the past four months."

"I haven't seen you around," Holly said.

"Oh? Do you get around all that much?"

"I sure do," Holly replied. "I work for the city. What do you do, Mr. Shine?"

"Ed, please. I'm retired from the property development business, in New York. Now all I do is grow orchids and play golf."

"What sort of orchids?" Not that she knew much about them.

"Lots of sorts. I develop hybrids. You know anything about them?"

"Not really."

"I was attracted to Orchid Beach first because of the name. Saw it on a map and thought I'd have a look."

"And you liked the town?"

"Orchid Beach is the way Florida should have turned out but didn't," he said. "No high-rises on the beach, beautiful neighborhoods, very manicured."

"I agree," Holly said.

Ham stepped up to the bar. "One of those," he said to the bartender, pointing at Holly's drink. He gave his daughter a kiss on the cheek.

"Ed, this is my father, Hamilton Barker, known as Ham. Ham, this is Ed Shine, a recent arrival in Orchid."

The two men shook hands. "Move over here, Ed," Ham said, pointing at the stool next to Holly. "We'll bracket her." He took the stool on the other side of her.

"Ed grows orchids," Holly said.

"Well, I guess Orchid Beach is the place for it. They grow wild everywhere, you know; that's how the place got its name."

They chatted on for a few minutes, then the headwaitress showed up to say their table was ready.

"Join us, Ed, if you're alone."

Shine stood up. "Thanks, I'd like that."

"Can you squeeze in another chair?" Ham asked the headwaitress.

"Sure we can."

They were shown to their table.

"Let me order some wine for us," Shine said, picking up the list. "I assume we're all here for the seafood."

Ham and Holly nodded.

Two hours later, they finished their coffee. Ed Shine had been an excellent companion—intelligent, amusing, and full of stories, and he had chosen a superior wine.

"Why don't the two of you stop by my place for a nightcap on the way home?" Shine asked. "I'll show you some orchids."

Ham and Holly consulted each other with a glance. "Sure," Ham said for both of them.

They followed Shine back up A1A, the highway that joins the barrier islands up and down the Florida coast. He took a few turns, and they wound up at a low, nicely designed house on the Indian River, which doubled as the Intercoastal Waterway. Shine led them inside and switched on some lights, revealing a beautifully decorated living room with good pictures on the walls. He poured them each a brandy, then waved them to follow him.

"Come on," he said, "I'll show you my orchids." He led the way through the house, opened a door, and switched on the lights.

They found themselves in a greenhouse some forty feet long, filled with tropical plants and many orchids.

"These are my babies," Shine said, waving a hand. "One in particular." He held up a pot containing a plant with a single, deeply red bloom. "This is my own creation, after a great deal of work: She's called the Blood Orchid."

Then there was the sound of shattering glass, and the pot in Shine's hand exploded. Holly hit the deck, along with Ham, pulling Shine down beside them.

"What was that?" Shine asked. "And why are we on the floor?"

"That," Ham said, "was the sound of a bullet fired into your greenhouse by a small-caliber rifle equipped with a silencer."

"And how the hell would you know that?" Shine asked.

"Believe me," Holly said, "he knows."

"Army," Ham said. "Thirty years of small-weapons use."

Holly crawled over to the door, reached up, and switched off the lights. "He missed you by inches, Ed. I think we should get back into the house," she said.

The three of them crawled out of the greenhouse and closed the door behind them. They sat on the floor and looked at one another.

"You carrying, Holly?" Ham asked.

"I'm afraid not," she replied. "I carry all the time in Orchid, but not when I go to Vero."

"Maybe you ought to carry all the time, period."

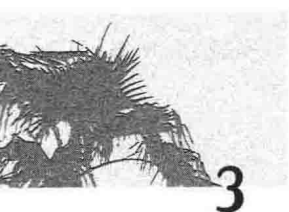
"It makes a handbag heavy," Holly said.

Then they heard a car start, and the spinning of tires on gravel.

"He's gone," Ham said.

"Jesus, I hope so," Shine replied. "I guess we'd better call the police."

"*I am* the police," Holly said.



Two patrol cars arrived in under two minutes, and Holly was proud. She sent the two cops outside to look for tracks while she sat in the living room and talked to Ed Shine.

"I'm going to take some notes," she said, digging a notebook out of her handbag.

"Sure," Shine said.

"Spell your name for me again?"

"S-h-i-n-e. It's German-Jewish, was originally spelled S-c-h-e-i-n, but the folks at Ellis Island screwed it up. My grandfather thought it was more American, so he kept it that way."

"Born?"

"New York City, seventy years ago."

She was surprised; he looked a lot younger.

"And you've been in Orchid four months, you said?"

"That's right. I sold my development company to my partner earlier this year, and I wanted to get out of New York, for tax reasons."

"Ed, can you think of anyone who would want to harm you?"

"Not a soul," Shine said. "That's why this is so baffling. Why would anybody want to shoot a retired developer?"

"Are you married?"

"I'm a widower for eight years."

"Have you been seeing anyone in Orchid since your arrival?"