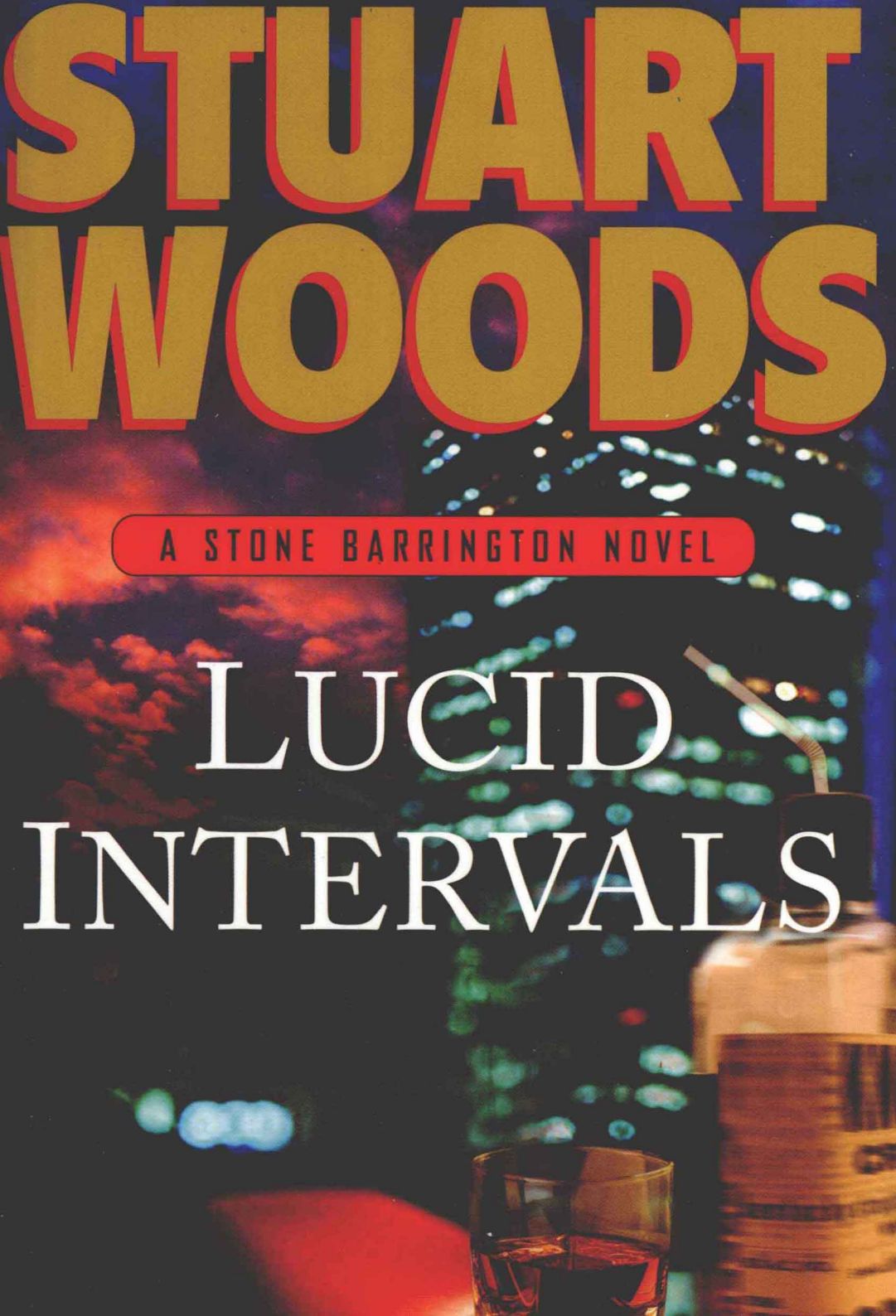


STUART WOODS

The background of the cover is a blurred night scene. On the left, there's a red, cloudy sky. On the right, there are out-of-focus city lights in blue and white. In the bottom right foreground, there's a glass of amber liquid and a blurred can.

A STONE BARRINGTON NOVEL

LUCID INTERVALS



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STUART WOODS

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

New York



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LUCID ————— ————— INTERVALS

BOOKS BY STUART WOODS

FICTION

Kisser [†]	Reckless Abandon [†]	Choke
Hothouse Orchid [*]	Capital Crimes [†]	Imperfect Strangers
Loitering with Intent [†]	Dirty Work [†]	Heat
Mounting Fears	Blood Orchid [*]	Dead Eyes
Hot Mahogany [†]	The Short Forever [†]	L.A. Times
Santa Fe Dead [§]	Orchid Blues [*]	Santa Fe Rules [§]
Beverly Hills Dead	Cold Paradise [†]	New York Dead [†]
Shoot Him If He Runs [†]	L.A. Dead [†]	Palindrome
Fresh Disasters [†]	The Run [†]	Grass Roots [†]
Short Straw [§]	Worst Fears Realized [†]	White Cargo
Dark Harbor [†]	Orchid Beach [*]	Deep Lie [†]
Iron Orchid [*]	Swimming to Catalina [†]	Under the Lake
Two-Dollar Bill [†]	Dead in the Water [†]	Run Before the Wind [†]
The Prince of Beverly Hills	Dirt [†]	Chiefs [†]

TRAVEL

A Romantic's Guide to the Country Inns of Britain and Ireland (1979)

MEMOIR

Blue Water, Green Skipper (1977)

^{*}A Holly Barker Novel [†]A Stone Barrington Novel

[†]A Will Lee Novel [§]An Ed Eagle Novel

This book is for Ted and Barbara Flicker.

LUCID

INTERVALS

Elaine's, late.

Stone Barrington and Dino Bacchetti were sitting at their usual table, eating penne with shrimp and vodka sauce, when a young man named Herbert Fisher walked in with a tall young woman.

Stone ignored him. Herbie Fisher was the nephew of Bob Cantor, a retired cop with whom Stone had worked many times. Bob Cantor was Herbie's only connection with reality. Herbie Fisher, in Stone's experience, was a walking catastrophe.

Herbie seated his girl at a table to the rear, then walked back and took a chair at Stone's table. "Hi, Stone," he said. "Hi, Dino."

"Dino," Stone said, "you are a police officer, are you not?"

"I am," said Dino, spearing a shrimp.

"I wish to make a complaint."

"Go right ahead," Dino said.

"What's going on, Stone?" Herbie asked.

Stone ignored him. "There is an intruder at my table; I wish to have him removed."

"Remove him yourself," Dino said. "I'm eating penne with shrimp and vodka sauce."

"You are a duly constituted officer of the law, are you not?" Stone asked.

"Once again, I am."

"Then it is your duty to respond to the complaint of an upstanding citizen."

"What kind of citizen?"

"Upstanding."

"I'm not at all sure that the word describes you, Stone."

Herbie, whose head was following the conversation as if he were seated in the first row at Wimbledon, said, "No kidding, Stone, what's going on?"

Stone continued to ignore him. "Dino, am I to understand that you are ignoring a citizen's complaint?"

"You are to understand that," Dino said, mopping up some vodka sauce with a slice of bread. "Do your own dirty work."

"Stone," Herbie said, "I'm rich."

"That's rich," Dino replied.

"No kidding, I'm rich. I won the lottery."

"How much?" Dino asked.

"Don't encourage him," Stone said.

"Thirty million dollars," Herbie replied.

"How much you got left after taxes and paying off your bookie and your loan shark?" Dino asked.

"I'm warning you," Stone said. "Don't encourage him, he's dangerous."

"Approximately fourteen million, two," Herbie replied. "I want to hire you as my lawyer, Stone," he continued.

"Why do you need a lawyer?" Dino asked.

"All rich people need lawyers," Herbie said.

"Could you be more specific?" Dino asked.

"Dino," Stone said, "stop this, stop it right now. He's sucking you in."

"Prove you're rich, Herbie," Dino said.

"I'll be right back," Herbie said. He got up, walked back to where the girl sat, picked up her large handbag, came back to Stone's table and sat down. He lifted up the handbag and opened it wide, displaying the contents to Stone and Dino. "What do you think that is?" he asked.

"Well," Dino said, gazing into the purse, "that would appear to be approximately twenty bundles of one-hundred-dollar bills each, or two million dollars."

"Absolutely correct," Herbie said.

"Do you always walk around with that much money, Herbie?" Dino asked.

"Only since I got rich."

"Oh."

"Stone, I want to retain you as my lawyer. I'll pay you a one-million-dollar retainer in cash, right now."

Stone stopped eating. "Dino, have you had any recent training at recognizing counterfeit bills?"

"Funny you should mention that," Dino said. "We had a guy in from Treasury the day before yesterday who gave us a slide-show presentation on that very subject."

"Would you examine the bills in the bag, please?"

Dino dipped into the bag and came out with a hundred-dollar bill. He held it up to the light, snapped it a couple of times and laid it on the table. "Entirely genuine," Dino said, then he turned to Herbie. "They don't hand out millions in cash at the lottery office, you know. Where did you get it?"

"I cashed a check," Herbie replied.

Stone flagged down a passing waiter. "David," he said, "would you please go and find me a good-sized paper bag?"

“Sure,” David replied. He went into the kitchen and came back with a plastic shopping bag. “No paper bags. Will this do?”

“Yes,” Stone said, accepting the bag and handing it to Dino. “Will you please put one million dollars of Herbie’s money into this bag, Dino?”

“That okay with you, Herbie?”

“Sure, go ahead,” Herbie replied.

Dino held the plastic bag close to the purse and counted out ten of the bundles. He handed the bag to Stone. “There you go.”

“Just put it on the floor beside me,” Stone said, and Dino did so. Stone looked at Herbie for the first time. “All right, you’ve got my attention; I’ll listen for one minute.”

“They’re trying to kill me,” Herbie said.

“Who is trying to kill you?”

“People who want my money.”

“Are these people aware that you walk around with two million dollars of it in a woman’s handbag?”

Herbie shrugged. “Maybe.”

“Herbie, you’ve been flashing this money around, haven’t you?”

“Well, sort of.”

“The hooker must know about the money, since it’s in her handbag.”

“What hooker?”

“The one you walked in here with.”

“She’s not a hooker.”

“Herbie, she’s with you; she is, ipso facto, a hooker.”

“Part-time, maybe,” Herbie admitted.

“Who do hookers work for, Herbie?”

“Me?”

“Besides you?”

“Madams? Pimps?”

“And who do madams and pimps work for, Herbie?”

“They’re self-employed, aren’t they?”

“They work for or associate with bad people, Herbie. If a hooker knows you’ve got two million dollars in her handbag, then her madam and her pimp know it too, and if they’ve had a moment, they’ve already sold that information to someone who wants to take it from you.”

“Sheila wouldn’t do that,” Herbie said. “She loves me.”

At that moment, as if for punctuation at the end of Herbie’s sentence, a fist-sized hole appeared in the front window of Elaine’s, and a loud report rent the air. This was quickly followed by two more shots.

Everybody hit the floor.

Stone raised his head an inch. “Are you *sure* Sheila loves you, Herbie?”

Dino was up and running at the door, clawing at the gun on his belt. He disappeared into the street.

People began cautiously to pick themselves up, look around and brush themselves off. Elaine sat two tables down, unmoving, looking unperturbed. The door opened, and a tall woman of Stone's acquaintance, though not recent, walked in carrying a very feminine attaché case.

Her name was Felicity Devonshire, though she was not called that by anyone who worked with her. She was, in fact, a high official of British intelligence who had formerly been called Carpenter but more recently, after a big promotion, had been dubbed Architect. A man had preceded her into the restaurant, and another followed her. They stationed themselves at the end of the bar, near the door, and watched the room.

Stone got up from the floor, dusted himself off, spotted Felicity and waved her over. They embraced casually. He could feel her ample breasts through her coat and his.

"Stone," she said, "what is going on? Dino is out in the street waving a gun around and shouting into a cell phone, and this place is a mess."

"Just a little after-dinner entertainment," Stone said, taking her coat and holding a chair for her, not missing the sight of her cleavage as she sat down. He took his seat, picked up the plastic bag with the million dollars in it and stuffed it into the hooker's handbag. Shoving the bag at Herbie, he said, "Go away."

Herbie began to protest, but Stone held up a hand like a traffic cop and then waved him back to his own table and the clutches of the perfidious Sheila.

Felicity watched him go. "Isn't that the awful little twit who gave you so much trouble a couple of years ago?"

"I'm afraid so."

"What was in the carrier bag?"

"A million dollars in cash."

"Oh." There were sounds of the sweeping up of glass from the front of the room, and a waiter appeared.

"Would the lady like a drink?" he asked.

"Thank you," Felicity said. "The lady would like a Rob Roy with ice."

Dino came back through the front door, holstering his weapon. "Felicity!" he said. "I thought that was you getting out of the Rolls."

"Hello, Dino," Felicity said warmly, for a member of the British upper class. She allowed herself to be pecked on the cheek. "How are you?"

"Pretty good," Dino said. "Sorry about the excitement; somebody put a couple rounds through the front window."

"Of course," Felicity replied.

Elaine came and stood by the table. "So," she said, "who's paying for the window?"

Stone jerked a thumb toward the rear of the room. "Herbie Fisher, and he's got the cash on him."

Elaine walked back to Herbie's table and slapped him on the back of the head. Stone could not hear what she was saying to him, but Herbie dipped into Sheila's handbag and came up with a thick slice of hundreds. Elaine tucked the money into her bosom without a word and moved on to the table of another regular.

"This has always been such an interesting place," Felicity said, sipping her Rob Roy.

Stone gazed with heartfelt lust at her pale red hair, her unblemished skin, and her very English but nevertheless sexy clothes. "You make it even more interesting," he said.

Felicity patted him on the cheek. "Aren't you sweet?"

"See anything outside, Dino?" Stone asked.

"A van, headed downtown," Dino replied. "I didn't have a shot. I called it in." He looked at the floor beside the table. "Where's the million bucks?"

Felicity spoke up. "Do you mean that there was *actually* a million dollars in that carrier bag?"

"It was Stone's retainer," Dino explained. "Herbie Fisher wanted legal representation."

Felicity regarded Stone with a curious glance. "And you declined? This is not the Stone I know."

"So," Stone said, changing the subject, "what brings you to town, Felicity?"

"Her Majesty's service," she replied.

"Oh, come on," Stone said. "Give us a hint."

"We are not in the 'hint' business," she said.

"Of course you are," Stone said. "Hints are what you do. I mean, you never come right out and say anything; you just hint."

"You may have noticed that I have not hinted. What on earth do you mean by refusing a fee of a million dollars?"

"You do remember Herbie, don't you?"

"How could I forget him?" she asked. "Asked to take a photograph of an assignation from a rooftop, he fell through a skylight

and broke both of one my colleague's legs, as I recall. Of course, my colleague was already dead, but that hardly matters in the circumstances, does it?"

"It does not," Stone said, "but you have just illustrated why I didn't take Herbie's money. It would have bought me ten million dollars' worth of trouble."

"Quite."

"Would you like some dinner?"

"Yes, please. I couldn't eat what they gave me at the Saudi UN embassy. I believe it was goat or something very like it."

Stone signaled for a menu, and she glanced at it.

"Order for me, would you?"

"You're starved?"

"Ravenous."

Stone turned to the waiter. "Bring her the *osso buco* with polenta and a bottle of the Chianti Classico," Stone said to the waiter.

"That's goat, isn't it?" Felicity asked. "Or something very like it?"

"You know very well that it's veal," Stone said.

"If you say so."

"Excuse me a minute," Dino said, and then headed for the men's room.

"He's being discreet," Stone said. "He knows you want to talk to me about something."

Felicity polished off her Rob Roy. "I wish to engage you," she said.

"I'd be delighted," Stone said.

"Not in *that* capacity," she said.

"In my capacity as an attorney?"

"In one or more of your capacities," she replied, "although Her Majesty can't compete with Mr. Fisher's generosity."

"What did you have in mind?"

"Well, we can do this one of two ways," she replied. "At your hourly rate—two hundred dollars, isn't it?"

“Five hundred,” Stone replied.

Felicity blinked.

“Everything has gone up,” Stone said.

“Apparently.”

“What was the other way we could do this?”

“I had in mind a more result-oriented arrangement,” Felicity said.

“What sort of result, and what sort of arrangement?”

“The result would be complete success, and the arrangement would be a payment of one hundred thousand dollars upon achieving it—to include all your expenses and any subcontractors you may require.”

“And what is the assignment?”

“The location and disposition of a weasel,” Felicity said.

“Have you tried the pet shops?”

“A weasel in the person of a disloyal former employee.”

“More information, please. What do you mean by ‘disposition’?”

“I mean putting him into my hands or those I may designate. You don’t have to kill him. I’m afraid that is all I can tell you until you have signed this,” she replied, removing a document from her briefcase.

Stone looked at the title. “The Official Secrets Act?”

“You read well.”

“Doesn’t this apply only to British subjects?”

“It applies to anyone who signs it,” she replied.

“Pounds,” Stone said. “Not dollars.”

Felicity uncapped a large fountain pen and handed it to Stone.

“I assume this is filled with blood,” Stone said.

“Yes, but not yours. Pounds, it is.”

Stone signed the document. “All right, tell me about it.”

Felicity’s *osso buco* arrived. “In the morning,” Felicity said, attacking the veal shank.