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Also by Kate Charles

A Drink of Deadly Wine
The Snares of Death
Appointed to Die
Evil Angels Among Them
Unruly Passions
Strange Children
Cruel Habitations
Evil Intent
Secret Sins
Deep Waters
False Tongues

A DEAD
MAN OUT OF
MIND

KATE CHARLES



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For Jacquie, who has demonstrated the value
of women's ministry to so many

The Book of Psalms mysteries: looking back, looking forward

It's difficult for me to believe, but it has been 25 years since I began writing *A Drink of Deadly Wine*, the first novel in what would become 'the Book of Psalms mysteries'. Contrary to what readers may believe, in my experience writers of fiction don't very often reread their own books – they are too focused on the future to have time for the past, too concerned with what comes next to worry about what has been. So the republication of this series of novels, 25 years on, has provided me with a rare opportunity to revisit a world I once inhabited totally, the world of the Church of England in the early 1990s.

In so many ways, the early 1990s belong to a long-gone past. Young readers today might find that past laughable, if not totally incomprehensible. Those years provide the context of the books: my characters live in a world which is, first and foremost, uncontrolled by technology. There are no mobile phones, and certainly no smartphones; phones are mostly attached to walls. No one listens to music on anything other than a radio or a record player, unless they're very modern and have adopted CDs. Televisions are large and bulky things. Home computers are non-existent, as are Kindles and other e-readers – not to mention iPads. People carry address books and use telephone directories. If they need information, they go to a library, and if they want to travel to somewhere unfamiliar, they look at a map.

Other differences are cultural, reminding us of how many things have changed in our society. In those books, supermarkets closed their doors by 5 or 6 p.m., and were never open on a Sunday. Pub licensing hours were strictly regulated. People smoked in pubs, restaurants and workplaces. Fox hunting was pretty much unquestioned. Laura Ashley represented the height of fashion. And 'British Rail tea' was unfailingly undrinkable.

And yet . . .

And yet, when moving into the sphere of the Church of England which these books so firmly inhabit, not so much has changed.

Yes, I can report with a joyous and thankful heart that women are now acceptable as priests in much if (sadly) not all of the Church, and by the time these new editions are published, women bishops will probably already be consecrated, or at least appointed. *Deo gratias*.

But so much remains the same, and not in a good way. Power struggles, judgemental attitudes, ‘them’ and ‘us’, gossip – it was true then, and I still see these things going on in parishes everywhere. It is the stuff of which mystery novels are made: the base human nature which puts self above others, and which manifests itself at its worst in the Church.

People often ask me why there are so many crime novels set in the Church, and this, I believe, is at the heart of it. The Church is the perfect setting for a crime novel precisely because human nature at its ugliest is most evident set against the ideal which the Church represents. And because church people are usually aware that a higher standard of behaviour is expected of them, when they are unable to live up to the ideal they have a better reason for concealment. Concealment leads to secrets, and secrets provide the perfect scenario for the crime novelist.

So when I embarked upon the series 25 years ago, I was but following in the steps of a long line of writers such as G. K. Chesterton, C. A. Alington, Victor L. Whitechurch, Ellis Peters and P. D. James, and writing in a tradition which would grow to include D. M. Greenwood, Phil Rickman, Andrew Taylor and James Runcie, among so many others.*

Why, though, the ‘Book of Psalms’?

As a member of a parish choir for many years, I have had the weekly privilege of singing the psalms, and have found them a source of incomparable richness. Especially when sung to Anglican chant, in the BCP Coverdale translation, they are replete with every human emotion, from sublime joy to utmost despair. In spite of – or perhaps even because of – their archaic language, they have a timeless resonance which speaks to me on so many levels. I have come to love them more than practically anything else in the liturgy; this series aside, there are only two of my subsequent novels which don’t also bear titles from the psalms.

* For further information on the history and tradition of clerical crime fiction, see my feature article/cover story ‘The Chief Suspect? Chesterton’ in the *Church Times*, Issue 7588, 22 August 2008.

When I began the first book, the title was a part of it from the beginning (Psalm 60.3), inextricably bound up with what I wanted to say about the characters, and about their relationships to each other and to the Church. I'm not sure why I set myself the task of finding an appropriate psalm verse as an epigraph for each chapter, but that became a challenge I enjoyed as the series progressed, and I now think it is one of the things about the series which has caused it to endure.

Another factor contributing to the longevity of these books is the fact that they are not in any way typical crime novels: yes, there are crimes in each of them, but the books are not *about* the crimes. The books are at heart about *people*, with the crimes providing a particularly potent way to set events in motion and put the characters under pressure, allowing me to explore their motivations and their actions. For this reason I find the American term 'mystery', with its additional theological overtones, to be more appropriate than the preferred British usage of 'crime novel'.

In my novels I have attempted to create and depict a consistent world, with characters who move in and out of story lines and sometimes reappear in unexpected places – much in the tradition of my favourite novelist, Barbara Pym. This presents a challenge for a writer who must also be concerned with plot: one of the unspoken rules for writing a series of crime novels is that they should be able to be read in any order, so that something in one novel does not give away the solution to a crime in another. This can be tricky with a cast of ongoing characters, but I do believe that people come to know and care about those characters.

For whatever reason, these books continue to be popular with readers. Scarcely a week passes when I don't receive at least one email from someone who has just discovered them, or loved them for a very long time and is desperate for another. I'm hoping that these new editions will bring 'the Book of Psalms mysteries' to a whole new, untapped, group of readers who will find something about them to enjoy.

A Dead Man Out of Mind, revisited

I can vividly recall the exact moment that I decided to write this book: it was a November day in 1992, and I had been watching the live television coverage of the historic General Synod vote on the ordination of women as priests. When they announced that the measure had passed in all three houses, I burst into tears of joy, and Rachel Nightingale came into being as I suddenly grasped the ramifications of this momentous and somewhat unexpected decision. The Church of England, I realized in that moment, would never be the same again. And I wanted to write about that.

The writing took place over subsequent months, while the shock waves were still reverberating, and the book was actually published just a few weeks after the first ordinations, in the spring of 1994, addressing the consequences of women's ordination both for the Church and for individuals. Because of this historical context, *A Dead Man Out of Mind* is in some ways the most dated of my books. It is tied to a specific point in time, when women could be deacons but not yet priests (let alone bishops!), and the IRA still disrupted London transport. Yet in spite of that it remains one of my own firm favourites among my books.

I've been trying to analyse why that is the case. It's partially, I suspect, because women's ordination is one of the issues which has passionately interested me over the years, and was by no means settled by the vote on that November afternoon. Also, I think that the book is inhabited by a number of strong and interesting characters, including two of my very favourites: Rachel Nightingale and Ruth Kingsley.

On rereading, *A Dead Man Out of Mind* stands up very well as an exemplar of the traditional detective story. It has a dead body at the very beginning with more to follow, a pair of amateur sleuths reluctantly investigating a crime that the police aren't interested in, a bunch of suspects with varying motives, a colourful setting, a great number of plausible red herrings and an equal number of clues displayed in plain sight yet invisible to all but the cleverest reader.

The primary theme of the novel is the potential cost of love, weighed against its rewards. Is it possible to love too much? Is it worth the risk? These are questions which ultimately confront David and Lucy: questions without easy answers, and ones with which they must grapple as their relationship enters its next phase.

Kate Charles

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I would like to thank everyone at Marylebone House, especially editor Alison Barr, for giving this book a new lease of life. Retrospectively, I offer my deep gratitude to my incomparable editor, the late Sara Ann Freed of Mysterious Press/Warner Books. I would also like to thank MJO; my debt to him is beyond words.

Author's note

As in the past, I have taken certain liberties in creating churches: St Margaret's and St Jude's, as well as St Dunstan's, are as much a product of my imagination as the people inhabiting them. I have also created the post of Archdeacon of Kensington, to avoid any possible confusion with actual clerics.

Dramatis personae

At St Margaret's Church, Pimlico

Fr Julian Piper	The late curate
Fr William Keble Smythe	Vicar of St Margaret's and St Jude's
Martin Bairstow	Churchwarden
Vanessa Bairstow	His wife
Norman Topping	Churchwarden
Dolly Topping	His wife
Stanley Everitt	Parish Administrator, St Margaret's and St Jude's
Joan Everitt	His wife
Mrs Goode	Housekeeper for Fr Keble Smythe
Robin West	Sacristan
Rachel Nightingale	New curate, St Margaret's and St Jude's
Dr Walter Bright	Parishioner
Vera Bright	His daughter
Nicola Topping	Daughter of Norman and Dolly Topping

In London

David Middleton-Brown	A solicitor at Fosdyke, Fosdyke and Galloway, Lincoln's Inn
Lucy Kingsley	An artist
Ruth Kingsley	Her niece
Mrs Simmons	Secretary to David Middleton-Brown
Sir Crispin Fosdyke	Senior Partner, Fosdyke, Fosdyke and Galloway
Henry Thymme	A solicitor
Justin Thymme	His son
Colin Nightingale	Husband of Rachel Nightingale
Francis Nightingale	Brother of Colin Nightingale
Cindy Lou Nightingale	His wife
Gabriel Neville	Archdeacon of Kensington
Emily Neville	His wife

Pamela Hartman
PC Huw Meredith
Russell Galloway

May Thymme
Mr Atkins

An immigration officer
A policeman
Senior Partner, Fosdyke, Fosdyke and
Galloway
Wife of Justin Thymme
Dealer in antiques

Elsewhere

Miss Morag McKenzie
Fr Desmond
Hamish Douglas
Alistair Duncan

Fiancée of Fr Keble Smythe
Spiritual director of Rachel Nightingale
Friend of Fr Keble Smythe
Housekeeper, St Dunstan's, Brighton

PROLOGUE

What profit is there in my blood: when I go down to the pit?

Psalm 30.9

It was a clear case of a burglary gone wrong; the police at the scene were in no doubt about that. They'd seen plenty of these church burglaries – an increasing number in recent years, and not just in rich London parishes like this one. Invariably they fell into two categories of crime. The professional burglar knew what he was looking for, often stealing to order; he would be in and out of the church quickly, leaving a minimum of mess behind. In these cases, the stolen items – silver mostly, and antique ecclesiastical furniture – would be on a boat to the Continent before they were even missed. The other sort of church burglary was of the opportunistic kind, and usually left chaos in its wake.

From the shambles in the sacristy, it was apparent that the burglary at St Margaret's Church, Pimlico, was in the second category. Papers and documents, evidently from the open safe, were scattered around the floor, a table had been overturned, an empty communion wine bottle smashed, and in an act of wilful and mindless vandalism, the purple chasuble which had been laid out for the next celebration of the Mass had been slashed to ribbons. But there was one significant difference from the usual pattern: by the safe lay the body of a clergyman, the back of his head caved in.

'He must have caught them in the act, poor devil.' Detective Inspector Pierce touched the arm of the young uniformed constable who had been the first officer on the scene; the man looked distinctly green round the gills, thought Pierce with compassion. They couldn't do any more until the police pathologist arrived to certify death – not that there was any doubt about it, but procedures must be adhered to – so Pierce began talking to take both their minds off the gruesome sight before them.

'I suppose it was kids,' he said with a detachment he didn't feel. 'These sorts of crimes usually are. Unpremeditated. They break into a church looking for something they can turn into a bit of ready cash. For drugs, you know – that kind of thing.'

The PC's Adam's apple bobbed up and down as he gulped convulsively, grateful for the distraction. 'And what do they do with ... with the stuff they take, sir?'

'Oh, they flog it for a few bob. It usually turns up down the Portobello Road in a day or two.'

'And do you usually catch them?'

Pierce smiled grimly. 'Sometimes we do, and sometimes we don't. Most of them are pretty stupid, you know. At least in this sort of crime. With the pros we don't have much chance of catching them, but the kids are a different story. The pros never leave prints, of course, but often the kids do. They wipe the obvious things and then leave a clear set of prints on a door handle. Or they wear surgical gloves and then peel the gloves off and leave them at the scene – with their prints inside.'

'So you think you'll catch whoever did ... this?' The PC's eyes returned without volition to the bloody mess that was the priest's head, and he gulped again.

'I'd say we've got a damn good chance,' Pierce reassured him. 'They're sure to have slipped up somewhere. They probably panicked after the priest surprised them, and when he ended up dead I imagine they got out in a hell of a hurry.' He fell silent for a moment, contemplating the body on the floor.

Pierce was undecided about the dead man's age; his black cassock gave no clues, and while his face was young and almost boyish, his dark hair was peppered with grey in virtually equal measure. That youthful, unlined face was turned towards Pierce, its blue eyes staring at him in a final look of sightless surprise. 'God, I wish that doctor would get here,' the inspector muttered, jamming his hands in his coat pockets.

A moment later his wish was granted. The police pathologist shoved his way into the room, made a quick examination, and nodded curtly. That was the signal for the scene-of-crime officers to begin their detailed work; as the specialists moved in to bag the hands of the corpse and gather evidence, Pierce led the PC out of the cramped and overcrowded sacristy and into the church.

'Can't you tell me what's going on in there?' The man who hovered outside the door looked terrible, his face as bloodlessly white as that of the dead man in the sacristy. In fact, thought Pierce, he had something of the look of a death's head about him, with a cadaverously gaunt face, sunken eyes in deep sockets, a high bony forehead, and a balding crown with a few lank and lifeless strands of hair brushed

across the top. ‘I’m the one who found him,’ he added, wringing his hands. ‘When I came in this morning. He must have surprised some intruders. Thieves, robbers. Oh, it’s just too terrible! That’s what happened, isn’t it?’

‘You know just about as much as we do at this point, but it seems likely.’ Pierce looked the man up and down. ‘And who are you, sir, if you don’t mind my asking?’

‘Oh, sorry. Sorry.’ The hand-wringing ceased as the man raised a hand to smooth the strands on the top of his head. ‘Stanley Everitt. I’m the Parish Administrator.’

‘So you work here?’ It had never occurred to Pierce that people other than clergymen worked in churches.

‘Some of the time.’ The man’s voice, with its unpleasant sibilance, took on a pedantic tone and he almost seemed to forget why the policemen were there as he explained. ‘I’m actually the Administrator of St Jude’s. You know, the big church up the road. St Margaret’s is a satellite of St Jude’s, so it comes under my jurisdiction as well. Most of the time I’m based at St Jude’s, but I spend one day a week here. Fridays. I always come here on a Friday.’

‘But this is Saturday,’ interposed the constable, a stickler for details.

‘Yes, of course, but there’s a wedding today, and the Vicar asked me to—’ Everitt broke off, suddenly recollecting what had happened. ‘The Vicar! Oh, how am I going to tell the Vicar?’ The hand-wringing resumed with increased agitation. ‘He’ll be shattered. He’s so over-worked already – however will he manage now?’

Pierce frowned in puzzlement. ‘You mean that bloke in there isn’t the Vicar?’

‘Oh, good heavens no. He is . . . was . . . the curate. Father Julian Piper.’

‘The curate?’

‘Technically the curate of St Jude’s *and* St Margaret’s, of course,’ Everitt explained. ‘It’s a combined benefice. Father Keble Smythe, the Vicar of St Jude’s, is Priest-in-Charge at St Margaret’s. But he’s far too busy at St Jude’s to have much time for St Margaret’s, so Father Julian usually takes – or rather took – the services here. Oh, dear. I just don’t know what’s going to happen . . .’

Pierce, tiring of the man’s rather prolix officiousness, interrupted the flow. ‘Mr . . . um . . . Everitt, as soon as they’re finished in there, I’d appreciate it if you’d take a look and let me know what, if anything, is missing. It will help us in our enquiries. Unless you’d rather that I asked the Vicar—’

