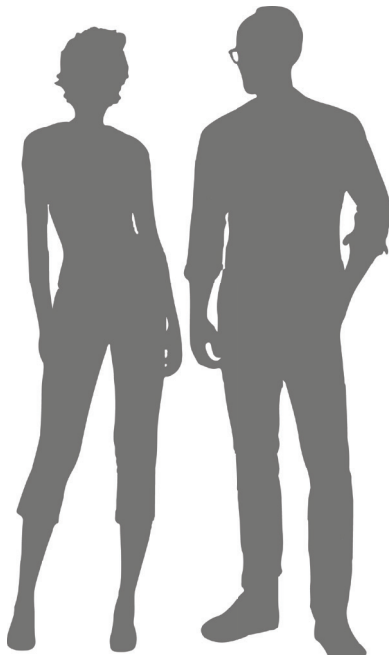


The Nest



Hal Glatzer

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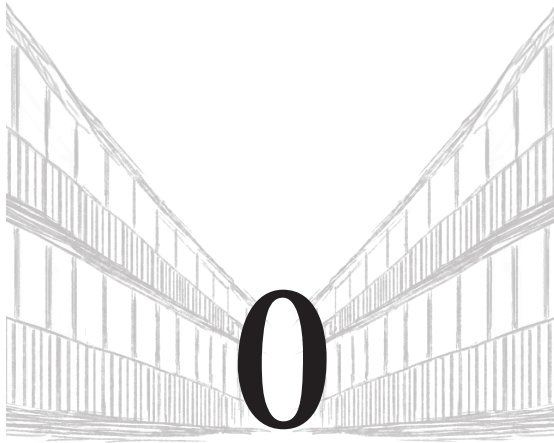
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*We'll build a sweet little nest
Somewhere in the west,
And Let the Rest of the World Go By.*

—Ernest R. Ball & J. Keirn Brennan
1919 song



DETECTIVE LARSON LED US INTO an interrogation room and switched on a video camera. We figured the district attorney was watching.

“Grand Lake City, Hall of Justice, August 26th, 2018. The subjects of this interview have been advised of their Miranda rights. Please confirm, both of you, that you are waiving the right to remain silent.”

“We are.”

“You have to believe us. We were—”

“Just a moment. You have counsel present. Please identify yourself.”

“Maxine Mendel, Attorney-at-Law.”

“Your clients are here because they are persons of interest in a murder investigation. Ordinarily, I would have interviewed them separately, but I have a reason for bringing them in together. We’ll come to that in a minute. Have you explained the risk they

face? I may separate them, and that what he or she says here may be used in evidence should either or both of them be charged with murder.”

“I have made that clear, Detective.”

“Good. Now, the two of you—do you understand the risks, and consent to be interviewed?”

“I understand, and I consent.”

“I do, too.”

“All right. Let’s hear what you have to say.”



I WROTE THIS BOOK TO explain what happened to Teddie and me, and the trouble we got into last August. For almost two years, she and I had been renting a studio in an apartment house that (we came to feel) was the cause of it all.

Wait!

When Herman told me he was going to work everything into a book, my first reaction was to kick him in the shins.

I didn't do that. But I did tell him he had to let me put something of my own in the book. He does have a flair for writing and editing. That was his business, after all. But I've been a school-teacher. I know something about getting information across by making it interesting. And I didn't want the book to be only what he saw, what he said, and what he said I said.

But I agree that, if you're reading this, you need to know

that our trouble began in the Falk Pond Apartments, and that we might not have put our lives at risk if we had rented anywhere else in town.

The Falk Pond Apartments is a pair of mirror image two-story buildings, called East and West. There are forty units—ten on each floor of each building, all of them small studios like ours. Thirty-nine are rentals; one is the management office.

The buildings are in a rustic style, like a lodge in the mountains, with rough-hewn logs on the outside walls, knotty pine on the inside walls, cedar shakes for shingles on the roofs, and various woods for railings and doors. Every apartment has a balcony facing a wide atrium between the buildings that's open to the sky, with tall grasses, trees, ferns and flowers along both sides of an artificial "mountain stream."

You'll want to know what we look like, too.

Herman's in good shape for a guy who'll be sixty-seven next January. He's clean-shaven, with a lantern jaw like a cartoon hero. And he's tall, which a man has to be to get my attention. True, his brown hair is more than half gray, and it's gone from the top of his head. And bags are swelling under his nearsighted blue eyes. But he dresses well, looks professorial in his gold-rimmed glasses, and has very good diction. Also he's terrific in bed. A perfect "fit," if you know what I mean.

Teddie's not much shorter or younger than I am but she's slender and athletic. She'd be what novelists used to call "lithe," except for those high-definition muscles in her arms and legs.

And she's tanned from playing tennis a lot. Her face is round, her eyes green, her nose just a little bigger and her mouth just a little smaller than you'd expect a good-looking woman to have. But I like her looks. And she's uninhibited, which adds to her sex appeal.

Nobody except Herman is likely to consider me sexy. I'm too flat and skinny to be mistaken for a porn star. No hairdresser has ever been able to tame the thatch on my head, although mine does turn the gray black. Fortunately, wildness is a hot look for young women these days, which helps me seem a few years less than (shhh!) sixty-three.

Our trouble started on August 23rd.

I was on our balcony a little after noon and caught sight of Ward Tyson crossing the little bridge at our end of the atrium stream. Managing the apartment house was the Tyson family's business, and Ward was the day-to-day manager. He was in his forties, tall but quite thin and not very healthy. His complexion was pale, and his breathing sometimes irregular. He came up the outside stairs on our end of the building, stopping halfway up to draw a few breaths through his inhaler.

Ward was slow to walk and talk, but quick to reprimand you if you draped stuff over your balcony railing, or your car was slightly outside its space in the parking lot. He also happened to be our landlord. I didn't know, at the time, how many units he owned, but ours and our next-door neighbor's were two of them.

When he knocked, I opened the door and smiled. "How're you, Ward?"

“Pretty good, Herman. Thank you for always paying your rent on time.” He glanced around. “Making lunch?”

“In a while. What’s up?”

“Mind if I come in?”

“You wrote the lease, Ward. If you’re doing an inspection, you have to give us at least seven days’ notice.”

“No, no. It’s not an inspection.”

I smiled. “Okay. Come on in.” I brought him out onto the balcony.

“I just want a word with you and Theodora.”

“I’ll tell her you stopped by. Any message?”

“Well, yes. You’ve had three six-month leases on this unit, and your current lease expires in December.”

“That’s right.”

Ward leaned against the balcony railing. I worried he might sit on it. He didn’t weigh much and probably wouldn’t break the old woodwork, though he might get a splinter. It needed sanding, but Teddie and I had never asked him to get his son Edgar to fix it. The less we saw of the Tysons, the safer we felt.

He opened his briefcase and handed me a printout on letter-head stationery. “The lease can be terminated by either party with at least thirty days’ notice. So I’m letting you know that I will not be renewing the lease for your apartment here: West 201.”

“Thank you for letting us know so far ahead. That’s very nice of you, Ward.”

I expected him to leave, but he said, “Hang on, Herman. I’d like to make you an offer. Would you be willing to vacate this apartment *before* your lease is up? Like maybe at the end of September?”

“In five weeks? Why so soon?”

“It’s not a demand, Herman. September weather’ll be better than December, for moving your stuff.”

“That’s true. Okay. We’ll let you know.”

“My son can help you move.” He was looking past me, back into the studio. “You don’t have much furniture.”

“We favor a Minimalist aesthetic.”

He took a moment to process that. “Have you got another place somewhere? A vacation house? I know a couple. They rented in town, saved their money and bought a cabin up in the Kirk Mountains. Is that what you and Mrs. Korn—?”

“Yeah. Like that.”

“Well, I guess it’s none of my business.” He waited for me to make the obvious retort. But when I didn’t, he said, “How about I sweeten the deal? If you and your wife vacate *before* the end of September, you can move right into East 103. I own that unit too.”

“Have we done something wrong? Broken the terms of the lease? What’s the prob—?”

“No, no, no! Absolutely not! You are wonderful tenants. You’re quiet, you always pay on time—and in cash, which is—”

“It’s easier for us.”

“Okay. Look. I want to take over your unit. And Josephine’s next door: West 202.”

“Hasn’t Ms. Ruby also been a good tenant?”

“Oh, yeah. Very, uh . . . well, there’s the smell of her cigarettes. But I forgot to put a no-smoking clause in the leases. That’s on me.”

“Why do you want us to move out?”

“Nobody’s buying studios anymore. I’m gonna bust through the wall and make these two units into a one-bedroom apartment. Combine the balconies. Turn one of the bathrooms into a

real kitchen. If you take East 103 before September thirtieth, I'll knock a hundred bucks off each month's rent . . ." he thought a moment. "For the first year."

"I'll need to talk with Theodora."

"There's another unit you might like better. East 201, on the second floor of the other building." He pointed to it. "See? It's right across from here. Thing is: my father-in-law owns it. So I can give you the same deal: a hundred bucks a month discount for a year."

"We'll think about it."

He looked toward the next-door apartment. "Is Josephine in?"

"I don't know."

"She's a good-looking woman, don't you think?"

"I'm married."

"She sunbathes on her balcony. Topless."

"Really?"

He lowered his voice. "She's got great tits."

I shrugged, said, "Thanks for the heads-up about the lease," led him back through our apartment, and closed the door behind him.

When I got to the apartment that afternoon, Herman was on the balcony. He looked up and smiled. "How are rehearsals going?"

I leaned over and gave him a smooch. "Really well!"

I'd always wanted to try acting. I'd joined the Lakeside Community Players last year but didn't get to play any of the older women in *Romeo & Juliet*. Now, though, I'd gotten my big break: the leading role in a one-act play.

"Remember. There are only three performances, the weekend

after Labor Day. You *are* going to come see me, aren't you, Drakey?"

"Of course, Ducky!"

We'd given each other nicknames the first week we had the apartment. Walking all the way around Falk Pond, pausing to watch the ducks, I'd called him "Ducky." But—being a guy—he wanted to be called "Drakey." So I took "Ducky" for myself. And that led to calling our apartment "The Nest."

August 23rd should have been like every other midweek day. But it wasn't. We even got a sort of a warning that night, about what could happen, though of course we didn't see it that way at the time.

We hadn't been to a movie in weeks. Drakey is big on current events. He wanted to go to a documentary about sea-level rise. I wanted to be entertained by a superhero action-adventure. I'm a sci-fi buff, a Trekker. I go to cons dressed as Lt. Uhura, from *Star Trek*. Herman thinks it's silly to indulge in what he calls "comic-book fantasy." So, cos play is one of the activities we *don't* share.

We compromised on a comedy-mystery called *Look Out Below!* A husband and wife get accused of murder, hide from the police, get chased by the killer, and wind up solving the crime themselves.

We were back in The Nest a little after eleven and climbed into bed.

I woke up in the dark, startled by a noise that sounded like a splash. Teddie was making little sleep-snuffles. I spooned behind her again, slept again, and woke up on my own side of the bed

just as the sun rose, hot and yellow, through the glass panes of the balcony door. My watch showed six-thirty.

I put on my robe and glasses, started the coffeemaker, powered my phone on, and brought up the online edition of the *Herald*. (Grand Lake City still has a daily newspaper, which makes me proud to live in my hometown.) The international headline for August 24, 2018, was the Pope's visit to Ireland. The national headline was the Secretary of Education saying teachers should carry guns. But I scrolled down.

It's rare, nowadays, for a small-city paper to do much original reporting. But the *Herald* had been pursuing a big story here in Grand Lake and running new developments almost every day.

There had long been a feud in town, between generations of Kirks (older money, higher social standing) and generations of Warriners (newer money, bigger political influence). But after some intermarriages over the years, the feud seemed to have run its course. Until this past June, when the Chief of Police, Jason C. Kirk, arrested his wife's uncle, Charles G. Warriner.

Mrs. Kirk had a Warriner family trust fund account, and on June 17th, her uncle was charged with stealing money from it. Chief Kirk announced the arrest at a news conference where he displayed photo-enlargements of paper printouts. They showed withdrawals from the trust fund, and matching deposits the following day in one of the uncle's personal bank accounts. The cop who'd discovered the bank records, Sid Thorerberg, was related to Chief Kirk by marriage. Maybe the old feud wasn't dead yet!

In the weeks that followed, the *Herald* ran editorial cartoons with caricatures of Montagues and Capulets, Hatfields and McCoy's. Letters-to-the-editor were full of schadenfreude over rich folks caught doing thievery.

But on August 12th, the *Herald* reported that Chief Kirk

had made a false arrest. Officer Thoberg had digitally altered the bank records before printing them out. The *Herald* obtained authentic documents from both banks and published them alongside the forgeries.

So, early in the morning of August 24, the latest news was that District Attorney Roos had empaneled a grand jury to consider indictments. The *Herald's* editorial supported the D.A. and asked, rhetorically, what could possibly have motivated the young officer to join his chief in smearing Charles Warriner's reputation?

Smiling, I set the phone down on the little café table and let myself be distracted by the summer sunrise that lit up the undersides of leaves on the trees. As it rose higher, it glistened on tiny ripples in the stream that meandered through the atrium: the greensward dividing our building from the one across. Too soon, though, the magic of sunrise yielded to the ennui of daylight. I sipped a little more coffee and touched the phone screen again, intending to return to the news.

But I glanced into the atrium. There was a dark lump of something in the stream. I stood up. Leaned over the railing for a better look.

A man in a pale blue shirt and black pants lay face-down in the water. All I know about things like this is what I see on TV crime shows, but it must have been a dead body.

Stepping inside, I nudged Teddie. "Wake up, Ducky. You need to see this."

She tilted her head and frowned a silent rebuke; but she got up, pulled on her robe, and followed me onto the balcony. Looking over the rail she said—only a fraction of a second before I did—"We have to call 911."

“Get dressed, Ducky. I’ll wait a few minutes to call, so you can be out of here when the cops show up.”

“I couldn’t let you deal with this all by yourself, Drakey.”

We hugged. Then I made the call.

So I guess this is a good time for me to spill some beans.

We signed the lease as Herman and Theodora Korn. We both wear third-finger rings, and I always give the Tysons a big smile when they call me “Mrs. Korn.” But last night was special. We don’t usually get to spend a whole night together.

Most days, we have lunch, then we shed our clothes and climb into bed. We smoke half a joint, then cuddle and snuggle, touch and stroke, kiss and lick, meld and merge, quiver and bump . . . you get the picture. We have a little nap, wake up around four o’clock, shower together and towel each other off with a little more necking.

By five o’clock on a typical day, we’re out the door, waving to each other in the parking lot, as I head home to my husband, and Herman goes home to his wife.



ABOUT FIFTEEN MINUTES AFTER I called 911, a uniformed cop and an EMT were checking the body. They looked up at the balconies. Without thinking, we waved to them.

“Oh, shit!” and “Now they’ll come up to question us!” we said simultaneously.

I hadn’t given my name to the 911 operator, but she’d have seen my phone number on her screen, so she’d probably have ID’d me. A young man and an older woman were out on their balconies too. I expected more tenants to be looking; but probably, by 7:15 they’d already left for work. Eventually the cops would ask everyone what they saw or heard. But they’d ask us first. We hugged, kissed, and fortified ourselves with more coffee.

Herman and me, we get together because we need to have sex in our lives, but our spouses don’t.

My husband, George Woodley, is a civil engineer, one of the Deputy Directors in the State Department of Transportation. A few times a month he has to inspect a highway project, or some other road work, out of town. But he's got cataracts and can't drive after dark. So he'll sleep at a hotel nearby.

Drakey's wife, Sylvia Booth, teaches forestry at Grand Lake College. Once a week she drives about a hundred miles to a research station up in the Kirk Mountains. And on those nights, to monitor the experiments, she stays on a cot in her lab.

Every so often, Sylvia and George will happen to be away at the same time. And that gives Drakey and I the rare opportunity to enjoy more than just a nooner. Closing your eyes and getting under the covers in the daytime just isn't the same as being wrapped up in the blanket of actual night. Darkness adds mystery. Time stops when the sun goes down.

Which is why, that night in August we didn't have to hurry. We could do everything at a snail's pace. It was very erotic. I remembered something Mae West is supposed to have said, and said it out loud: "Everything worth doing is worth doing slowly."

We slept like two spoons the whole night long. We looked forward to having breakfast together, out on the balcony, enjoying the morning sun. We thought we were so lucky!

But then we saw the body. And everything went to hell.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Although *The Nest* is set in the modern age, most of Hal Glatzer's fiction has been set in the historical past.

Katy Green, a working musician in the years leading up to World War II, gets gigs that draw her into mortal danger. *Too Dead to Swing*, *A Fugue in Hell's Kitchen*, and *The Last Full Measure* were published by Perseverance Press in the early 2000s. *Too Dead to Swing* and *A Fugue in Hell's Kitchen* are also audio-plays, sold by audible.com.

In audio exclusively are *Vengeance in Vegas* and *A Dead Body's a Deal-Breaker*—Hal's humorously hardboiled “minuscule mysteries:” the all-alliterative adventures of Mark Markheim, the Hollywood Hawkshaw, a shamus with a shingle in tinsel-town.

During the Pandemic, he wrote five Sherlock Holmes pastiches—all of which were published in U.K. anthologies. Hal, who is active in several Sherlock Holmes “scion societies,” self-published them all together in his own anthology, called *The Sign of Five*.

Born and raised in Manhattan, he went to public schools, the Bronx High School of Science, Syracuse University for a BA in English, and the University of Hawaii for an MA in Communication. But Hal's writing career began in daily journalism.

As a newspaper and television reporter in the 1970s, he found his ideal beat covering the “silicon revolution:” the rise of communication satellites, small computers and other personal electronic devices. He wrote four non-fiction books on those subjects, which were published in the ‘80s, and stayed on the high-tech beat until the mid-’90s, when the internet—ironically—killed the market for “computer” magazines.

But he got his first mystery novel out of that beat. *The Trapdoor*, about a hacker who gets in trouble with organized crime, was published by Paperjacks in 1986. That led him to join the professionals in Mystery Writers of America; when the Katy Green books were published, he joined Sisters In Crime.

Hal had long wondered why so many cities used to—but no longer—have streetcars. So he spent years doing research, and created the illustrated bildungsroman *Dead In His Tracks* to answer that question. This he self-published as an eBook on amazon.com.

When Hal is not working as an author, he works as a musician, playing guitar and singing *The Great American Songbook* from Tin Pan Alley and Broadway.

More about Hal’s music and mysteries can be found on his website: www.halglatzer.com

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