

TO MURDER MY LOVE IS A CRIME!

by MATTHEW ASPREY



WHEN DID I make the decision?

It was the night the tide raged into Bivouac Bay. I watched the waves retreat. What a sight – catfish floundering on the shore in a slick of sewage. I told the driver to park the limo at the edge of the beach. I kept the windows closed to the stink. The villas on Dover Heights glittered behind us. I wrote a letter:

Dear David,

You'll remember me from the incident at your wedding. After that I was forced to leave Bivouac Bay for a period of reinvention. Now I've returned and I still love your wife. On the altar you smirked and called me a pitiful virgin but in my time away I addressed that issue by fucking girls just as limber as Helen. Now you cannot talk to me as a failure, you must speak to me as a man, you must treat me with respect, you must use my name.

It *would* make sense in Helen's muddled brain to marry you. She couldn't resist an instant motherlode of furs, *haute couture*, exotic vacations and diamonds. But I know the depths of her greed. Such a motherlode will ultimately seem no more than basic sustenance. I tried to explain this to her at the wedding to avoid one more tiresome bend in the road to our union but she's too dense to twig to logic.

Do you know Helen lies to you, David? You live together in Dover Heights in your two-storey villa behind the high stucco walls and the electronic security gate; each evening you blowpoke the fire and wait for her to emerge from her bath wearing that green silk kimono with the embroidered curlews (one of my many gifts!); you watch her stupid sitcoms and rub her nipples through the kimono while her wet red hair makes a damp shadow on her shoulders. It must feel wonderfully intimate and permanent but *you don't know her!* I am going to relieve your ignorance.

I know and accept Helen's horrible secrets. I've known her since she worked (yes, she once *worked!*) at Norwich-Stein Jewellers in the Sun Village Shopping Centre. It was while staring at those glittering displays that she acquired her addiction to diamonds. We were teenagers. In those days my job was to clean the food court. There is no way a Heights boy like yourself could imagine the indignities I endured (e.g. cleaning up smeared dogblood and dogshit from the centre management rug). My mother was cruel to make me work there. Only Helen made it bearable.

She was the jewel between the cut-price meat market and Charmaine's Footwear.

Every afternoon I would put aside my mop and go to the jewellery shop and make Helen pull out the watch catalogues and quote the prices. That was my conversation-starter. And after that we'd talk about everything within her incredibly limited range of interest – horses or shoes or the previous night's television. (Her execrable taste! How do you put up with it? Here's an idea: Don't.) With a smile she'd complain about all the attention she was getting. Men who came in to buy engagement rings would ask for her number. She wasn't allowed to leave the shop, so I brought her the doughnuts from Mr Donut she liked – big doughnuts with yellow doughnut icing and chocolate sprinkles. I bought them with my own money. She never acknowledged this, of course. As if donuts grow on trees. Still, the image upon which my heart pivots is of Helen biting into a big doughnut and licking the sludgy icing from her front teeth with the tender tip of her serpent's tongue.

She was able to leave Norwich-Stein when she started fucking that cretin Podolski for his cash and presents. That was a disappointing if predictable development. It was now necessary to deliver the big doughnuts to her house. We'd have our conversations on the doorstep. Then one day the door was opened by her insane father, who poked a bolt-action Mauser into my face. He forced Helen to suspend communication with me. But I'm loyal. I contracted the services of a courier service and devoted my income to purchasing gifts due a woman of her beauty – chocolate truffles, Belgian citronettes, *eau de toilette*, almond bath oil, patchouli soaps, the aforementioned green silk kimono. I'm sure she has never shown you the Egyptian lace G-string. I discretely monitored her laps at the swimming centre in case she began to drown. I followed her and her stupid friends to the Cat Alley Discothèque, where I was refused entry until I bribed a bouncer (just to let me sit in the corner with a Blue

Hawaii!). Luckily I was in the vicinity the night the girls were accosted on the street by a pack of drunks. Show us your tits, that sort of thing. Well, later that night those men found their Ford Fairlane in a cloud of fire on Elver Street. For legal reasons I cannot say anything further about the matter, David, but you can see that when I'm on the watch Helen is protected. And now I've got money and I've got friends in influential departments, people I can call on to obey my orders. No questions and swift execution.

By now you should have realised you're just a meal ticket but do you also know you're a cuckold? Do you know she cheats and lies? Do you know she still fucks Podolski? (Tuesdays, his Rolls-Royce, the country club car park). Of course that situation will be dealt with. But it is time for you to forfeit. There is an undeniable future for Helen and myself. I realise that she's simply a heartless, greedy, lazy, unfaithful, self-pitying, jewellery-junkie whore. Only I can satisfy her because I unreservedly accept her grotesque self-indulgence and need for grand flattery and cash.

I have documents that incriminate you in fraud related to the Remarque-Magruder deal of last month. You want proof? I'm aware of your account at Banco Gun Bay in the Cayman Islands. I'm aware of your association with Mr Caleb Cysarz. Proved.

In light of this you will meet me at eleven-thirty tonight at the Suicide Cabaret on Cheviot Street. I'll be wearing a bespoke charcoal-grey cashmere pinstripe with a purple jacquard silk necktie and monogrammed silver cufflinks. Things have changed. The "eternal" social hierarchy of Bivouac Bay – a structure that you, as an Aird, have abused for years – proves itself as ephemeral as yesterday's newspaper.

BORIS

I instructed Farquhar, my neatly mustachioed driver, to cruise down Laudonnaire Avenue below Dover Heights. The streetlamps

were twinkling. Waistcoated valets were returning cars to patrons outside The Bloated Turk, The Black & Tan, The Lobster Dock and The Jolly Harpoon.

“Where we going?” demanded Bodge, my temporary security guard, an enormous Anguillan Negro of six-feet-three-inches. He was picking his teeth with his thumbnail.

“Never mind,” I said.

I ordered Farquhar to stop the car at the intersection with Mondini Lane. I stepped onto the pavement in my new black calfskin loafers. Limpy McNeill, smoking across the street outside the cinémathèque, cried, “How’d you like it then, Boris?” I was puzzled but I ignored him. A fattish grey-haired couple from the Heights leered in passing envy of my outfit. I stared back without humour and they hurried on.

David Aird’s villa was bright as a beacon on the hill. I pulled out a pair of binoculars and surveyed the bacchanalia. Light shimmered on the white stucco walls as slim nude bodies broke the surface of the swimming pool. Couples and triples embraced by the second storey balcony railing. The drunken stockbrokers were attempting to dance with the dour cocktail waiters. There were young women dry-retching into the flowerbeds. Even down on the avenue you could hear the moronic beat of the reggae.

A poisonously shitty wind blustered up from the beach. I triple-buttoned my overcoat and approached Boiled Oyster Brown, who was untying his apron outside the Jerusalem Coffee House at the end of his shift.

“Want to make a buck, Boiled Oyster?”

He squinted at me in the light of the streetlamp. He was old. His brown face was crinkled like a raisin. "That you, Boris?" he said. "Where'd you get them fancy clothes?"

"I want you to deliver a letter to that prick David Aird at his villa on Delage Circuit. It's urgent. Can I trust you?"

"Isn't that a gated street?"

"Buzz the intercom. Make sure you put the envelope in his hand."

"I'm tired, Boris. Been working since noon."

I handed him the envelope as well as fifty bucks. He nodded. I also gave him a sealed Mr Donut box.

"This box is for Helen Roberts, Aird's 'wife'. Make sure she gets it. Personally."

The box contained, in addition to a dozen of Helen's favourite big doughnuts, a diamond and cabochon emerald bracelet. Boiled Oyster said goodnight to his boss, then he shuffled up the lane with the envelope and the Mr Donut box.

I instructed Farquhar to proceed to the country club. The uptown streets were all but deserted because the Olympic Games opening ceremony was on television. I declined Bodge's request to switch on the limousine TV. He folded his hands over his belly and grumbled something.

We passed through the wrought-iron gates of the country club. Farquhar idled outside the entrance of the clubhouse restaurant. That cretin Podolski and his haggy wife, the anti-handgun campaigner, were slurping clam chowder at a window table.

"Look for a green Rolls-Royce," I said.

We found the saloon far from the other cars at the bottom of the car park. I jumped out and discovered we'd now escaped the bayside

smell of shit. I pulled on kid leather gloves. Oh, it was cold out by the golf links. The snowcaps on Mount Epney up north must have been melting. I sucked an invigorating breath down to my diaphragm. Then I took a crowbar and a can of petroleum from the boot of my limousine. I smashed the saloon's windows. Shards of glass spat into the air. The noise was tremendous. I dumped petroleum all over the backseat – where Podolski had squelched inside Helen - and then dropped a match. The saloon blazed in purifying fire and exploded as Farquhar sped out of the car park. Through the tinted back window I watched the diners run outside to watch. Apple-shaped Mrs Podolski screamed. Her cretinous husband, in his stained seafood bib, stared in bewilderment.

We went downtown across the Dog Island Bridge. The south side was essentially another city. On this Saturday night the Forty Thieves and the Druids were warring outside the Southdown St bus depot with bricks, cobblestones, nail guns, Molotov cocktails, et cetera. I saw Tad O'Brien gashing the arm of Bill the Swede with a socket bayonet. A juvenile delinquent was giving the bum Werewolf Tom a nasty kicking on the doorstep of the Anabaptist Bookshop. The cops would not interfere. Up on Cheviot Street whores with black bobs and ratty fur stoles lined the wall outside the Suicide Cabaret. They saw me in my new suit and began pawing at my sleeves. They smelled of jasmine and bergamot. It was intoxicating but I shook them off and yelled, "Don't you know I am loyal to Helen Roberts!"

One of the girls, Lulu DeMille, squinted at me. "Oh, it's Boris. I didn't recognise you."

Bodge and I went down the stairs to the cabaret. The red lights were low. There were less than fifty people gathered for that

evening's revue. Rubber Joe was onstage squeezing himself into a tin barrel. I nodded at Detective Dzhugashvili, sitting as requested in plainclothes near the telephone booth. He winked affirmatively. I went to the bar. Bodge kept guard by my side.

"You're back?" said Floris, the barmaid. She was in her late fifties, painted with rouge and gold eyeshadow, and much heavier than I remembered.

"Give me a Blue Hawaii in a gored pineapple," I said. "And an apple and pear juice for my bodyguard."

"Do you have the cash?"

Even in my beautiful new suit I was questioned! I threw a hundred dollars onto the bartop. Contemptuously.

Floris shrugged. "Okay, you do."

"Things have changed."

"Just no crazy stuff, okay?"

"For your information, Floris, I've never perpetrated any crazy stuff here. I don't appreciate that suggestion."

"What do you call burning an effigy of David Aird in the carpark?"

"Wishful thinking."

She handed me my change. I put fifty bucks in her tip jar. Her eyes brightened. She smiled. "Oh, thanks a lot, Boris."

"Things have changed."

Scouse Julia, a factory tart from out in Sun Village, was standing at the bar draining a pint of stout. "Hallo, Boris!"

I turned. "Yes?"

She giggled. "So 'how'd you like it then, Boris?"

"What is 'it'?"

She laughed. "Don't tell me you haven't seen the advert?"

“Do you think I waste my time watching television?”

“Oh, it’s great, you should see this advert, Boris, you really should. There’s this little boy named Boris who’s got lovely curly red locks and all, but he won’t let anyone wash them, see. Not, that is, till he’s given Brudek’s Lovely Locks Shampoo And Conditioner. And the advert goes, ‘Even Boris likes it. Let’s ask him: How’d you like it then, Boris?’ And then little Boris says, smiling like, ‘My word I do like it. Oh, yes, I do indeed.’”

“I was named after Boris Presley Ward, the great poet and father of our national literature.”

The barmaid leaned toward Julia. “I tried Brudek’s myself. Do you think it’s improved my lustre?” She flicked the end of her blonde-grey ponytail.

I walked away. By the jukebox I encountered that idiot Derryn Burre I knew from Sun Village High.

“How’d you like it then, Boris?”

“I hate it.”

Derryn chortled. “Same old Boris. What’s with the suit? Going to a wedding?”

Max Wherry, the former swimming team captain, was shooting billiards. He chalked his cue. “How’d you like it then, Boris?”

I nodded to Bodge. He karate-chopped Max in the side of the neck. The athletic bastard bounced off the edge of the billiards table and cracked his fucking skull against the floor. Bodge then delivered the same to Derryn, who winced and sprawled immobilised on top of Max.

“Things have changed,” I told them.

I handed fifty bucks to a towering Samoan bouncer so he would dump the bodies in the back alley.

The booths had naugahyde seats and tables laminated with faux-marble formica. I sipped the Blue Hawaii and watched Hell-Cat Maggie walk onstage with her trio. She had a fat arse and shook it like Little Egypt. The musicians, however, looked like bank tellers: moustaches, tinted glasses, greying white business shirts and clip-on ties. Hell-Cat Maggie launched into the 'Sun Village Blues':

*Did you hear about Gimpy Joe? Fellas broke his back
Across the communal lawn, in one of the cul-de-sacs.
And if he don't straighten up soon
He's gonna have to limp all the way back, ha ha!*

Somebody's telephone rang at a nearby booth, and Bodge jerked around so quickly that his apple and pear juice splattered across my suit jacket and shirt front.

"Idiot!" I hissed. "This is bespoke!"

He tried to dry me with a paper napkin. I elbowed him away.

David Aird arrived just as the burlesque act was getting interesting. He wore an inferior suit: cashmere, yes, but off-the-rack. He was tanned, square-jawed and slightly pissed. Five of his brothers and two grown nephews came inside with him. They were big men, hideous in starched pink or green shirts, thick ties and spiked hair.

"No, no, no, no, no!" I said to David. "You alone. Get these guys out of here."

"If you think I'm going to sit alone with you, Toad, you're even crazier than you used to be."

“You will address me by my name!” I yelled, smashing the gored pineapple on the tabletop, splashing the drink. “Say it!”

One of the brothers sneered, “How’d you like it then, Boris?”

David silenced his brother with a raised hand. He stared at me. “By contacting me you’ve violated the court order. I’m having you locked up. I’ve left a message with Judge Cricken.”

“Judge Cricken,” I answered, “has come to change his opinion of the original ruling. I had lunch with His Lordship today. So you better listen, you shit. There is a safe deposit box containing the Remarque-Magruder files in a certain out-of-town bank. Today I mailed a set of keys to each of your business partners. Unless we come to an immediate agreement on Helen, your associates will be reading these files tomorrow.”

One of the brothers tapped David on the shoulder. “Why don’t we just beat Toad until he tells us the location of these files?”

At that suggestion I signalled Detective Dzhugashvili to advance to my booth with a dozen of Bivouac Bay’s finest in plainclothes.

“Not a good idea,” I said to David.

David nodded. “How come this sudden influence?”

“That’s my business. But things have changed.”

David sent his brothers to the bar. I waved Detective Dzhugashvili and his men away. David and I faced each other across the table.

“Now we will talk about Helen,” I said. “Did you ask her about her association with Podolski? Well?”

David said nothing.

I laughed. “You will forfeit, David. You are beaten. You are a supply depot on Helen’s road, a brief pit stop. And she’s ready to move on.”

“I think you’ll have difficulty convincing Helen of that.”

“Don’t imagine I’ll be discouraged by further rejection and humiliation. In fact, a quick agreement from Helen to come away with me would go against tradition.” I smiled. “You’re in no position to bargain. Did she like the doughnuts?”

I waved over a cigarette girl and bought a Cohiba cigar. I guillotined the cap and flared my lighter.

“A guillotine and a burst of flame,” I said. “Might be your future, David. Unless you’re fucking wise.”

Rum was filtering into my bloodstream, the piano player was rhapsodizing on a charming jazz tune, and David Aird was staring at me with powerless hatred. The moment was perfect.

Then out of the corner of my eye I saw Inspector Ruttmann enter the cabaret. Brisk and purposeful, lean as a dachshund, he whispered into Dzhugashvili’s ear. The detective frowned and marched towards me.

“Ruttmann says your credit card is cancelled. The payment didn’t come through.”

So my mother had called the bank because of the irregularities on her statement. I supposed she had also discovered the missing Christmas money. Shit. I turned to Dzhugashvili. “I’m in the middle of a meeting. We can clarify this later.”

Dzhugashvili snorted. “No, I’m pulling my men out.” He directed his plainclothes detectives up the stairs onto Cheviot Street.

“There’s been a mistake!” I yelled.

Dzhugashvili struck my face with the back of his hand. My cigar flew across the carpet. “I should run you in for wasting our time,

Toad. The second you put a foot wrong in Bivouac Bay you're going down." He bowed to David Aird. "Evening, sir."

Aird laughed: a horrible, smug, violent laugh!

Bodge was nervously watching David's brothers and nephews, who were now advancing to the booth. He checked his watch. "Shift's done," he said, lifting his arse off the naugahyde.

I seized his right arm. "Stop!"

He pushed me away and departed.

David leaned forward, his white teeth gleaming. "Now, Toad, you will tell me about this safe deposit box."

He seized my necktie and wrenched the knot so tight I was dribbling Blue Hawaii down my chin.

"Stop!"

"Where is it?"

"Stop!"

"Where is it?"

"I made it up!" I spluttered. My eyesight was speckling with light. I squirmed and knocked Bodge's empty tumbler off the table. "I...I..."

"Tell me!"

"I spied. I overheard your phone call...to Caleb Cysarz...in the steam room...the Ambassador's Club! I don't know anything more! Let me go!"

"And Judge Cricken?"

"A lie...he's gone fishing up the coast."

David roared with laughter and thrust me away. I fell out of the booth and, rolling on the sticky carpet, struggled to loosen my tie. David ordered a whisky from the waitress. I sprung to my feet and ran, knocking Scouse Julia aside, leaping the stairs to the street. It was

freezing. Farquhar and my limousine were gone. Betrayal. I sprinted past the black-bobbed whores on Cheviot Street. One girl, Drusilla Pierce, seeing me now at the mercy of David's gang, snarled and flicked a cigarette butt in my direction.

On Boonoke Avenue above the Woolwash building a billboard read: *How'd you like it then, Boris?* I kept running. I saw hope ahead: the 988 bus dropping a passenger at the bus stop. I screamed for the driver to wait, but he pulled away and roared towards Sun Village.

The bus passenger was Boiled Oyster Brown. He stood in the flickering fluorescent light, buttoning his jacket.

"Boiled Oyster!" I yelled. "Help me! It's Boris!"

He looked at me with his tired eyes. "What can I do?"

I heard the gang's heavy footsteps pounding down the avenue. I ducked into a laneway and came out at the edge of Riley Park. Shit-smearing drunks leered at me from the doorsteps. I crossed the park and was caught outside the Church of St. Eligius, that sooty gothic edifice where I had glumly attended mass as a child. One of the Aird brothers spun me onto the stone steps and razored my bespoke jacket.

David loomed above me with the spire of the church behind him. He laughed and unsheathed his hunting knife and sank the blade into my right thigh until it ticked the bone. I twisted and moaned in agony.

"Next time I see you I will stick this knife in your heart," David whispered into my ear. He withdrew the knife. The men left me bleeding on the steps.

"No! No! No!" I yelled at the shadows crossing Riley Park. "I am no longer a hostage to this fraudulent and ephemeral hierarchy!"

The clocktower over at the courthouse struck midnight. When I tried to stand blood flooded over my beautiful calfskin loafers. I fell back onto the church steps and plotted fantastical revenge. I would kill David and his brothers and nephews and force their flesh through a mincing machine.

Putrid winds from the bay swept across the park. The great oak trees rocked and flung heavy acorns onto the grass. I shivered and tried to crawl up to the church door. I slipped in my own blood and found myself rolling down the steps.

“Fucking whore!” I screamed. “Miserable bitch! Can’t you see that I love you!”

I heard old Father Adrian running down the church steps. He lifted me upright. I gripped his collar. My blood stained his soutane.

“I’ll call the ambulance, Boris,” he panted. The old man ran as best he could back up the stairs.

But already Detective Dzhugashvili and his men were advancing across Riley Park with Abraham Podolski. My mother, a ski jacket over her nightgown, was accompanying them.

So that was the moment I decided to torch the town from the Heights to Sun Village.

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About the Author

MATTHEW ASPREY is a writer and academic from Sydney, Australia. His non-fiction has appeared at PopMatters.com and in academic journals, his short stories in *Island*, *Extempore*, and *Total Cardboard*. The novellas *Red Hills of Africa* (2009) and *Sonny's Guerrillas* (2011) are available as paperback chapbooks and e-books.

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