

Patricia M. Muhammad
presents

THE SPEAKEASY MURDERS


Special Objects

A mystery/detective novel usually has one or more investigators set upon a journey to solve a case. They use their wit, intellect and fortitude to follow any clue, whether great or small. Besides what is presented before them, they also use the most practical object in their arsenal, their analytical mind. Helen Williams was one such detective. Her colleagues admired her for seeing beyond the obvious even to the minute details. Yet, she was never arrogant. Her astute mind could not bear the burden of such a superficial trait. Her mind, however, could gauge the minds of others to assist in what she could have missed. After all, none of them are perfect. Williams and her colleagues sometimes worked together as a team. In these particular cases they must work together to solve a string of murders near a local speakeasy. Lieutenant Johnson partners her with her co-detective Stephen Patterson. His mind is of a different space, but not too much. He suffers nearly in silence from a potentially debilitating condition. Here, Helen must incorporate a different aspect of her mind in order to discreetly help him as he deals with a moment of its manifestation. However, it is not only Helen's mind that is in her capable arsenal in order for her to perform. She noticeably relies on her favourite object, an heirloom magnifying glass. It is made of brass. The optic is of middling weight. Williams inherited it through one of her forbears who fought to obtain a higher education. Helen uses it often to search for clues that she may have missed with her natural sight. Rarely does she allow any of her co-detectives to use her favorite instrument. On the occasion that she does, the detective hopes that her colleagues will see what she does without having to directly guide them.

Helen does not speak much of any of the significance of the magnifier. Yet if anyone were to become better acquainted with her and know her a bit deeper, they maybe could sense the subtle. It is almost as if each time the detective successfully closes a case assignment, she is acknowledging that she is carrying on the legacy of her work ethic of her recent ancestor. He is proud watching over her from beyond, yet Helen may take greater confidence in knowing that it was she who accomplished these tasks—with the help of her co-detectives.

It seems as though she sometimes hold onto it to keep herself centered. She has never let anyone borrow it. Williams usually keeps it locked in her desk when she is not using it to examine her case files. It is a hybrid of an heirloom and workplace tool. When she goes undercover, it appears that the magnifier is replaced by a more suitable accessory, a cigarette holder.

A not so obvious object of importance in *The Speakeasy Murders* is the station house. This is where a lot of the detectives spend their time when they are not undercover or in the field. Some may view it as any other office with desks, chairs, filing cabinets and a break area. Yet here is the cluster where busy mind work in a hive, filtering the known from the unlikely. This is station house for a short time became home to the detectives for a short while when Lieutenant



Johnson ordered a lockdown after a violent incident aimed to intimidate the law enforcement officers. This is also where Stephen Patterson and Helen Williams initiate their scheme to identify and apprehend the perpetrators of victims' murders. The station house echoes the doubts, assurances, the silent fears and the cheers of all who work to uphold the values of what their career endeavours define. However, the station house is only the springboard for Patterson and Williams to resolve their cases.

The speakeasy is where Helen and Stephen have assumed their new identities undercover. She replaces her sometimes fiddling habit she had with her magnifying glass above ground with the cigarette holder, a costume prop. However, this holder only provides Helen with temporal relief of her nervousness. For Stephen, it is the one object that saves him and Helen from their identities being revealed the first night they appear at the underground club's door. Each potential patron must speak the password. Patterson forgets. Williams holds the cigarette holder with a questioning look to her co-detective. He never relayed the password to her. Stephen amusingly recalls his colleague's confusion about the nature of the object. This reminds him of the password to enter into the speakeasy. The password is "plume". They have now entered into the world below. Patterson and Williams now in a world they had only recently been introduced to. Other objects seem to only contribute to the atmosphere of the speakeasy, the phonographs, the drinks, the floorboards; all of these interact, pull from one another, leap into the hands of or support the feet of the club's visitors. Their folly, lightheartedness and, yes, even crime makes for a night unforgettable. The detectives must experience a few of these.

Helen continues to wear her cardigan over her flapper dress. This sweater is the one object that could make her readily identifiable as not one from that world. One man notices, a British gentleman. His name is Thaddeus. Helen questions him politely as to why he appears not only in Chicago, but at the speakeasy. The Brit questions in like kind. He reveals later that her wearing the cardigan caused him to deduce that she was not truly from the underground world. Yet Williams' cardigan is not the only object that connects her to her growing relationship with Thaddeus. There is a point during their courtship that he proposes to her with his grandmother's ring. She accepts.

Helen is humbled by Thaddeus' thoughtfulness. He had waited for a while to present it to her. Now the reader can see the influence of each of their forbears had on a future decision affecting their lives. Williams with her magnifier and Thaddeus, not only with his grandmother's ring, but also one that he has for himself. They are to be wed, but in order to do so, they must ensure their safety. Helen believes that she has to resolve this case. Her stats aren't her priority this time, it is her future with the British gentleman who easily danced his way into her heart as she gifted herself to him. Thaddeus and Helen have already made their intentions known to each other. The speakeasy is becomes nearly the last object of the story, nearly the end point of the resolution. There are other objects in last few scenes. They will determine who will leave alive. It all depends whose hands they fall into.