

Synopsis

A POINTED DEATH

While walking her shorthaired pointer, NOLA BILLINGSLEY finds the body of her former employee ROGER CHEN in a WW II battery on the foggy bluffs of a coastal park in San Francisco. Roger embezzled from her startup before it crashed and burned. He was an amoral creep who spent Nola's development money on performance-enhancing herbs, fast living and faster women, but Nola would not have wished this grisly death on him. Roger had done something far more despicable than forging payroll checks to earn this horrific fate - an execution by beheading.

The one bright note in this tragedy is that the police investigation into Roger's embezzling is closed, freeing Inspector ROBERT HARRISON to ask Nola out. Nola and Robert experience a potent attraction despite troubled pasts that work against their forming a commitment. Another obstacle in their way is their inability to find a decent place to have sex in the most romantic city on earth.

Nola returns to consulting in the biotechnology industry after her startup fails and is welcomed back with gusto by the financial gurus who fund the new bioscience ventures. Valued as a fixer who solves corporate planning and communications problems, Nola soon finds her plate full with a portfolio of new clients. While working on an IPO project at Screen Leaf, Inc., she learns Roger was an employee of Screen Leaf at the time of his death.

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Thinking Roger died because of something he discovered at the company, Nola starts snooping. She stumbles on a plot to steal America's bioscience assets involving industrial thieves who pilfer intellectual property and biological samples from young gene splicing companies under the guise of performing contract services.

Nola shares her discoveries with Harrison and a sting operation is setup using several of her clients. The trap is sprung and the industrial espionage ring shut down, but not before the ringleaders escape. Harrison wants Nola to hang up her sleuthing shoes and leave crime busting to the professionals, but this Baby Boomer woman has problems with authority in general and the police in particular. Her college roommate was murdered, the police botched the chain of evidence and the killer walked free. Besides, Roger's death is still unsolved. Informed by Harrison at the conclusion of the payroll-forging probe that Roger was the scion of a wealthy Asian American family, Nola believes Roger had even less motivation to steal for money. She also concludes the industrial thieves have more to hide than pinching corporate secrets.

Nola's Boomer idealism and feminist empowerment compel her to put her relationship and her life at risk as she tries to solve Roger's murder and determine the real scientific goals of the corporate crooks. She establishes a link between the thieves and the Chinese government. With the help of a bevy of brainy biotech colleagues, dubbed the RNA Irregulars, who believe scientists

should do whatever they can to protect their industry and its beneficial discoveries from evil abusers of technology, she unearths a plan to pervert bioscience in the service of a state policy aimed at secretly suppressing fertility on a mass scale.

When Nola goes public with the story of government acting against its own people, she unleashes a firestorm of publicity, earns the admiration of her industry, locates the escaped fugitives and learns the secret of Roger's demise, but deals a body blow to her love affair.

Nola Billingsley is a forty-eight year old single woman living with her mother. Along with many leading edge Baby Boomers, she aspires to an exciting career and an independent lifestyle. A 'be-careful-what-you-wish-for' case in point, Nola is a successful businessperson, but her love life is a train wreck. Her first beau entered the priesthood, the second never came back from Vietnam and the third loved the bottle more than he loved his bride-to-be. Harrison and Nola hit it off, but Nola is concerned about Robert's unresolved feelings for his former partner who died in the line of duty. These two may have problems making commitments, but they sure have great sex, or at least they do when not assaulted by sea creatures, felons and jealous canines, constrained by claustrophobic quarters or hampered by the after effects of athletic exploits.

JANIE BELLE BILLINGSLEY would prefer nothing better than to see her daughter married to a man of good family, good Southern family that is. A genuine belle of the bourbon-drinking variety,

octogenarian Janie counters Nola's modern views with an unstoppable stream of practical advice, when she is not plying the pious folks at St. Agnes Episcopal Church with deviled eggs and cornbread or cheating them at bridge. Janie Belle learns Harrison hails from Baltimore, a town below the Mason Dixon line, and she determines to cook for him until he cries uncle and proposes to Nola.

SKOOTCH E. HURRY is the one reliable man in Nola's life. He is a shorthaired pointer dog from the San Francisco pound. The 'E' does not stand for anything; Nola feels the dog has such presence he deserves a middle initial. Skootch doesn't do any dumb book/movie things such as talk; he just watches Nola's back when she gets in the usual scrapes to which amateur sleuths are prone. Oh, and Skootch finds some of randy Roger's herbal elixir and develops a sex life of his own. Bad, bad doggie.

Nola has a love/hate relationship with her city. SAN FRANCISCO, the birthplace and still reigning capital of biotech, the glamorous, amorous, splendid, schizoid, achingly scenic home of a diverse, often bizarre farrago of politically correct foodies, English-challenged cabbies, flaming plutocrats, fulminating bureaucrats and eager exhibitionists. A wired Tower of Babel by the Bay, wrapped in fog and foie gras waiting for the day when the Really Big One cuts her loose, she becomes her own country and Robin Williams really does become president.