

The First Two Pages: *Secret Lives and Private Eyes*

When I was younger and dreamed of becoming a writer, I never imagined how much revising and rewriting were involved in the process. I went through what felt like thousands of rounds of self-editing, several rounds with my wonderful Sisters in Crime – Central Virginia critique group, and three rounds with the publisher’s editor and proofreaders.

I started *Secret Lives and Private Eyes* with four different opening chapters. The original introductory chapter was moved further in the story. And the new first chapter eventually became a prologue to the mystery. The novel begins:

“Hey, do you want another drink?” slurred the man on the barstool next to Delanie Fitzgerald.

Delanie leaned in closer. “No, but I’d like to go somewhere and get to know you better. What do you think about that?” she asked, winking at the fifty-something sitting next to her. She tossed her long red curls to one side and tilted her head toward him. She hoped the black dress showed enough cleavage to do the trick.

He smiled. He looked like he was expecting her to kiss him. When she didn’t, he waved to the bartender for the tab.

The man placed two twenties on the bar next to his glass. Delanie slid off the barstool, careful not to cause her micro-dress to creep any higher. Flipping her shiny purse strap over her shoulder, she made her way out through the crowd. Delanie felt his ragged breaths on the back of her neck, huffing and puffing like he’d run three or four laps. He reached out and touched her shoulder, trying to steady himself.

When they arrived at the parking lot, she said, “I’m over there. I’ll follow you. Where to?”

“I dunno. I’m not from this part of town.”

“We could go to your place,” she suggested.

“Uh, no. Too far. It wouldn’t be any fun.”

“Well, I’m all about fun. Okay, where then?” She shivered and wished she had brought a jacket, but it would have ruined the effect.

“Uh, I dunno,” he stammered. “I think they’re some places over near the interstate a couple of blocks from here.”

“Okay. I want somewhere nice with a Jacuzzi.”

“I didn’t bring a swimsuit.”

“Neither did I,” she said.

He leered at Delanie, taking in her long legs and short skirt, while fishing through his pockets for his keys.

“I’m in the beige Corolla down there,” he said.

She climbed in her black Mustang and watched him stagger to his car.

Delanie felt a tinge of guilt for letting him drive drunk, but she needed to get him at a motel. She started the engine. He still hadn’t made it to his car. After turning on the lights and the radio, she kicked off the four-inch heels that pinched her feet and made her calves burn. She threw them in the backseat and settled in to watch what he would do next.

He finally backed out, and Delanie followed behind him until he pulled into a small motel at the entrance ramp to I-95. The sign under the neon vacancy advertised Jacuzzis and free breakfast.

He parked and walked over to her car. Rolling down the window a crack, she waited. He leaned forward but didn’t say anything.

“Why don’t you get us a room?” she asked. “I’ll pull around back and wait for you to get everything ready.”

“Okay,” he smiled again and wandered off in the direction of the office. It was twelve thirty-five according to the radio display.

Pulling the tiny video recorder out of the backpack she always kept in the front seat, Delanie made sure she captured him going into the office and talking to the desk clerk. Before he returned, she drove around back and parked midway down the row. She turned her lights off and waited in the seedy parking lot, dotted with mostly working lampposts.

A few minutes later, the Corolla parked at the end of the row. Her date weaved up the outside steps to the second floor. Recording his ascent, she zoomed in on the room number before he opened the door. She wasn’t sure what he was waiting for.

When he went inside and turned on the lights, Delanie clicked the camera off and flipped her lights on. Backing out, she pointed her car toward the interstate.

Her conversation with Mrs. Clayton tomorrow wouldn't be pleasant, but it was probably expected. Delanie had enough evidence on the camera and the wire taped to her stomach to make the divorce attorney drool. This one was easy. She didn't have to do anything for the setup but hang out in his favorite bar. He found her there and started chatting her up. Another working Friday night, and Delanie Fitzgerald couldn't remember the last time she had a date she didn't have to secretly tape.

I struggled about whether or not to identify my private investigator, Delanie Fitzgerald, in the prologue. In the end, I decided to in order to tie my character and her investigations to the first case in the story. Originally, I started with a prologue about why Delanie was being hired by a tell-all author in California to investigate what happened to rock star, Johnny Velvet. I ended up moving this section to another part of the story because I wanted readers to meet Delanie, see the type of work she did, and see some of the struggles she faced as a female private investigator before launching into the main story. Even though we don't get deep insight into her character yet, we learn she has long red hair, drives a Mustang, picks up an older, drunk man in a bar, and follows him to a seedy motel. After watching the man rent a room, we learn that Delanie is a private investigator who can't remember the last time she went on a real date where she didn't have to secretly tape anyone.

From here, I hope the reader is interested in my sleuth and her adventures to continue reading *Secret Lives and Private Eyes*.

Author Biography



Heather Weidner's short stories appear in *Virginia is for Mysteries* and *Virginia is for Mysteries Volume II*. Currently, she is President of Sisters in Crime – Central Virginia, and a member of Guppies and Lethal Ladies Write. *Secret Lives and Private Eyes* is her debut novel.

Originally from Virginia Beach, Heather has been a mystery fan since Scooby Doo and Nancy Drew. She lives in Central Virginia with her husband and a pair of Jack Russell terriers.

Heather earned her BA in English from Virginia Wesleyan College and her MA in American literature from the University of Richmond. Through the years, she has been a technical writer, editor, college professor, software tester, and IT manager.

Synopsis

Business has been slow for Private Investigator, Delanie Fitzgerald, but her luck seems to change when a tell-all author hires her to find rock star, Johnny Velvet. Could the singer whose career purportedly ended in a fiery crash almost thirty years ago, still be alive?

And as though sifting through dead ends in a cold case isn't bad enough, Chaz Wellington Smith, III, a loud-mouthed, strip club owner, also hires Delanie to uncover information about the mayor's secret life. When the mayor is murdered, Chaz, is the key suspect. Now Delanie must clear his name and figure out why landscaper Tripp Payne, keeps popping up in her other investigation. Can the private investigator find the connection between the two cases before another murder – possibly her own – takes place?

Secret Lives and Private Eyes is a fast-paced mystery that will appeal to readers who like a strong, female sleuth with a knack for getting herself in and out of humorous situations.

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