

The First Two Pages

Skeletons in the Attic by Judy Penz Sheluk

I'd been sitting in the reception area of Hampton & Associates for the better part of an hour when Leith Hampton finally charged in through the main door, his face flushed, a faint scent of sandalwood cologne wafting into the room. He held an overstuffed black briefcase in each hand and muttered an apology about a tough morning in court before barking out a flurry of instructions to a harried-looking associate. A tail-wagging goldendoodle appeared out of nowhere, and I realized the dog had been sleeping under the receptionist's desk.

Leith nodded towards his office, a signal for me to go in and take a seat, then followed me, plopping both briefcases on his desk. He leaned down to pat the dog and pulled a biscuit out of his pants pocket. "Atticus," he said, not looking up. "My personal therapy dog. Some days, he's the only thing that keeps me sane."

I nodded, slipping into a chair closest to the window. It wasn't a particularly large office, and you definitely got some street noise—horns honking, sirens, the occasional revving of a motorcycle engine—but it did offer a decent view of Bay Street. I watched as countless individuals of every possible size, shape, and color scurried along the street, as cyclists—completely insane in my opinion—weaved their way in and out of the endless stream of gridlocked traffic; in the heart of Toronto's financial district, everyone was always in a hurry, even if getting somewhere in a hurry wasn't possible.

Atticus took up residence in a chair by the corner. Going by the blanket that covered the fabric, this was his regular seating arrangement. It amused me to think that Leith Hampton, a criminal defense attorney known for his blistering cross-examinations and ruthless antics, both in and out of court, owned a goldendoodle, let alone one that was allowed on the furniture.

That's the opening for my most recent mystery novel, SKELETONS IN THE ATTIC. We know immediately that the story is being told in first person, but we're not sure who our narrator is, or why they are in a criminal defense attorney's office. We do know, however, that the narrator is keenly observant. Every detail, from the sandalwood cologne to the pedestrians on the street below to the dog blanket on the chair, is noted, assessed, and filed for possible future reference.

Now I'm going to let you in on a little secret: that scene was culled from personal experience. I was waiting in the reception area for my lawyer (family law; I write about crime, I don't commit them!) and I was there with my husband, Mike, to update our wills. Like Leith Hampton, our lawyer owned a goldendoodle who seemed to have the run of the office—although his dog is not named Atticus, which, in my humble opinion, is a great name for a lawyer's dog.

While we were waiting, Mike read a couple of back issues of *Bicycling Magazine* and I started brainstorming. What if I was waiting in his office for another reason? What if I was there for the reading of a will? What if it was my father's will and I was the only one who stood to inherit? What if there was a condition attached to that inheritance? It would

have to be something sinister. What about a murder? A thirty-year-old murder...ah ha, that was the ticket...it was time to get writing.

What goes on behind closed doors doesn't always stay there...

Calamity (Callie) Barnstable isn't surprised to learn she's the sole beneficiary of her late father's estate, though she *is* shocked to discover she has inherited a house in the town of Marketville—a house she didn't know existed. However, there are conditions attached to Callie's inheritance: she must move to Marketville, live in the house, and solve her mother's murder.

Callie's not keen on dredging up a thirty-year-old mystery, but if she doesn't do it, there's a scheming psychic named Misty Rivers who is more than happy to expose the Barnstable family secrets. Determined to thwart Misty and fulfill her father's wishes, Callie accepts the challenge. But is she ready to face the skeletons hidden in the attic?

Find Skeletons in the Attic: <http://www.imajinbooks.com/skeletons-in-the-attic>

SKELETONS IN THE ATTIC is now available for pre-order on Amazon Kindle for the special introductory price of .99 (reg. \$4.99). Find it here:

<http://getbook.at/SkeletonsintheAttic>



Judy Penz Sheluk's debut mystery novel, *The Hanged Man's Noose*, was published in July 2015. *Skeletons in the Attic*, the first book in her Marketville Mystery Series, was published in August 2016. Judy's short crime fiction appears in *World Enough and Crime*, *The Whole She-Bang 2*, *Flash and Bang* and *Live Free or Tri*. Judy is a member of Sisters in Crime, Crime Writers of Canada, International

Thriller Writers and the Short Mystery Fiction Society. Find Judy on her website/blog at www.judypenzsheluk.com, where she interviews other authors and blogs about the writing life.