

“Baby Killer” in *Day of the Dark*
By Margaret S. Hamilton

(The First Two Pages is devoting August to celebrating the release of Day of the Dark, a mystery anthology edited by Kaye George, published by Wildside Press, and inspired by the coming total solar eclipse. I hope you enjoy getting a look at the opening pages of some of the twenty-four stories in this anthology!)

I love eclipses and meteor showers. A few years ago, we watched the Transit of Venus through a telescope at the Cincinnati Observatory.



Excited to write my eclipse story, I struggled to generate a plot. I find solar eclipses wondrous, but ominous. Twain uses a solar eclipse to great effect in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, but an actual solar eclipse event is so short. What dastardly crime could happen during those crucial two minutes?

I considered the great milestones in life: birth, marriage, and death. Two of my three children were born during the full moon at the end of October, when the maternity floor was filled with new mothers and their babies. I'm a firm believer in the power of lunar events.

Childbirth it would be, with a very pregnant protagonist, Mandy Malone, whose astronomer husband leaves her behind in Ohio while he travels south with his astronomer buddies to experience the path of totality in Tennessee:

“Mandy Malone woke, tangled in sweaty sheets, hearing the chant ‘Baby Killer, Baby Killer.’ In her nightmares, the trees had whispered the phrase. The words became louder. ‘Baby Killer, Baby Killer.’ Was someone outside? The upstairs windows were open to the cool night air. Motion-activated floodlights flicked on and off. Could it be the crazy cat lady? She’d never come during the night.”

A few hours later, Mandy encounters the crazy cat lady:

“The chanting grew louder. ‘Baby Killer, Baby Killer.’ With difficulty, Mandy shifted to look behind the bench. She wasn’t hearing things. It was Florence Kennedy, the crazy cat lady, wearing her usual cat print muumuu and carrying an umbrella. When Florence had discovered that Mandy lived in her former family home, she had started following Mandy on her daily walks, muttering that eclipses killed babies.”

Mandy and her pregnant side-kick Ella investigate why Florence believes that solar eclipses kill babies. With an open police case of a pregnant woman who disappeared during a previous eclipse, and a scheming caregiver using Florence for her own devious reasons, life is perilous for the pregnant women of Jericho, Ohio. Mandy and Ella, with the assistance of the police, solve several eclipse-related birthing mysteries.

Mandy is a terrific character—sensible and practical, off to a good start as an intrepid amateur sleuth. She’ll definitely be back in future books and stories.

Readers, do eclipses evoke certain emotions for you?



Margaret S. Hamilton has published short stories in *Mysterical-E*, *Kings River Life*, and the *Darkhouse Destination: Mystery!* Anthology. She was a finalist in the 2016 *Southern Writers Magazine* short story contest. Margaret writes a monthly blog for *Writers Who Kill* and is a member of Sisters in Crime and Mystery Writers of America. She is completing her debut contemporary mystery novel, *Curtains for the Corpse*, which is set in the same fictional Jericho, Ohio as “Baby Killer.” Margaret lives in Cincinnati. The photos are of Montgomery, a Cincinnati suburb that resembles Jericho.

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