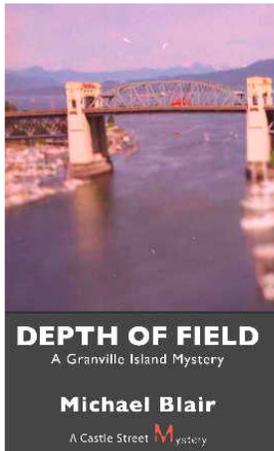


Depth of Field

A Granville Island Mystery

by

Michael Blair



It was Tuesday, a little past nine in the morning. The fog outside my third floor office window was so thick you could scoop it up with a shovel and cart it away in a wheelbarrow. Unusual for Vancouver in June — virtually unheard of, in fact — but given the winter we’d just been through, nothing would have surprised me weather-wise. The environmentalists blamed it on global warming. The conspiracy theorists blamed it on scalar weaponry run amok. I just grouched.

I was alone in the studio, feet up — definitely not unheard of — coffee cup nestled in my lap, wondering where the hell everyone was, when I heard the elevator rattle to a stop and the door bang open. I dropped my feet to the floor, startling

Bodger, who’d been catnapping on the sagging leather sofa against the opposite wall, tattered ears twitching as he dreamed of fat, complacent mice — or the cat treats I kept in my desk drawer, which were a lot easier to catch.

“Well, it’s about bloody time,” I said, as I went into the outer office.

“Pardon me?”

“Oops,” I said, looking at a shapely blonde. “Sorry. I was expecting my associates.”

“That’s quite all right,” she said.

The top of her head was level with the tip of my nose. She had sharp, emerald-green eyes, nice cheekbones, and a wide, generous mouth painted the colour of cherry Jell-O. I guessed she was thirty-five, give or take.

“Can I help you?” I asked hopefully.

“I’m looking for Thomas McCall,” she said, surveying the chaos. We were relocating on the weekend and the studio looked as though a giant child had thrown his toys about in a fit of temper.

“You’ve found him,” I replied. “What can I do for you?”

“I’d like to hire you,” she said. Her voice was light and slightly scratchy, as if her throat were lined with fine sandpaper. A smoker, I thought, although she didn’t smell of tobacco. In fact, her scent was faintly reminiscent of marshmallow, simultaneously sweet and musky and powdery.

“I’d like to be hired,” I said. “Never mind all this. We’re in the throes of moving to a new location. Come into my office. Would you like some coffee?”

“No, thank you,” she said.

“Don’t sit there,” I said, as she looked down at the sofa and Bodger looked up at her. “You’ll get cat hair on your skirt.”

She was wearing a three-quarter length black leather coat, narrow at the waist, flared at the hip, and an above-the-knee black skirt. Her patent leather, lace-up boots, also black, had long, pointy toes and three-inch stiletto heels. I placed a straight-backed chair in front of my desk, held it for her as she sat down. She crossed her legs with a whisper of nylon. She had very nice knees.

“You’re sure you wouldn’t like a cup of coffee?” I said again, as she unfastened her coat, revealing, I couldn’t help but notice, a very impressive superstructure.

“I’m sure, thank you,” she said.

I went around my desk and sat down. “So, how can I help you, Miss ...?”

“Waverley,” she said in her scratchy voice. “Anna Waverley. And it’s missus. Or at least it will be until my divorce becomes final.”

“Miz then,” I said.

She smiled. She had a very nice smile, revealing near perfect teeth, except for one slightly crooked upper incisor, to go with the nice knees and impressive superstructure. Her complexion was clear and smooth, no telltale crow’s feet around her eyes and mouth. I revised her age downwards half a decade, and wondered why she wore her hair and dressed in a style that made her look older.

“In any event,” she said. “I got the house in Point Grey, the condo in Whistler, and the boat, which I’d like to sell. I don’t see any reason why I should pay a broker’s commission, so I thought I’d sell it privately, which is why I came you. I need photographs to send to prospective buyers. I tried to do it myself with my little digital camera, but I didn’t like the way they turned out.”

“Okay. That — ”

“Except it has to be done right way. This evening, if at all possible. I’ve already lined up a potential buyer I’d like to email the photos to, but he’s leaving for Hawaii first thing in the morning.”

“That shouldn’t be a problem,” I said. We’d recently purchased an almost new Nikon digital SLR that was compatible with all our older Nikon gear, lenses and flashes and such. “What’s the name of the boat?” I asked. “And where is it?”

“It’s called *Wonderlust* — with an ‘O’ — and it’s at the Broker’s Bay Marina at the west end of Granville Island.”

“I know the marina,” I said, adding, “I live on Granville Island.”

“Oh, do you?” she said. “How convenient. Will you be doing it yourself then?”

“Yes, probably,” I said. No sacrifice was too great.

“Would eight o’clock be all right?” Ms. Waverley said. “I could meet you there.”

“That sounds fine,” I said.

“I really appreciate you doing this on such short notice, Mr. McCall.” She opened her purse and took out a plain white business envelope, from which she removed a pair of keys with a paper tag and a wad of fifty dollar bills. “I wasn’t sure how much you would charge. I hope you don’t mind cash.”

“Not at all,” I said. “But it isn’t necessary to pay in advance. We’ll invoice you.” I took our standard work order form out of my desk drawer.

“If you don’t mind,” Ms. Waverley said, “I’d prefer to pay in cash. It leaves less of a paper trail.” She smiled her very nice smile. “You know how it is with divorce.”

“I do,” I said. I slid the work order form back into the desk drawer.

After we’d agreed on an amount, to which she insisted on adding another fifty — “For the inconvenience,” she said — she returned the balance to the envelope, tucked it into her purse, and stood. “I’ll see you this evening at eight then,” she said, holding out her hand.

I stood and took her hand. It was warm and strong, and ever so slightly work-roughened, perhaps by a hobby; I couldn’t imagine her doing manual labour.

“Where can I reach you if I, um, need to reach you?”

“My cellphone number is on the key tag.” She indicated the keys on the desk. “In case I’m running late, you can let yourself aboard.”

I walked her out into the studio. She jumped a little as the stairwell door opened and Bobbi Brooks, my business partner, came into the studio. Bobbi’s eyebrows went up as Ms. Waverley went into the elevator.

“I’ll see you at eight,” Ms. Waverley said. The elevator door rattled shut on her.

“Who was that?” Bobbi asked, as she followed me into the office.

“A new client,” I said.

“How lucky for you,” she said.

“Indeed,” I said.

“Her hair wasn’t real, though.” She sat down on the sofa next to Bodger, who grunted softly as she picked him up and cuddled him in her lap. “Or her boobs, probably,” she added.

“Could’ve fooled me,” I said.

“Not exactly a challenge. What did she want?” Bodger rumbled contentedly as Bobbi stroked his ears and I explained the job. When I’d done, she said, “Not a problem. I’ve got nothing on till later this evening.”

“Um,” I said. “I thought I’d handle it.”

She sighed. “Aren’t you supposed to be meeting what’s-his-name about his catalogue shoot?”

“What’s-his-name” was the ex-Honourable Walter P. Moffat, former Member of Parliament for Vancouver Centre, the riding that encompassed downtown Vancouver and Granville Island. Wally the One- Term Wonder, as the media had dubbed him after he’d been roundly trounced in the most recent exercise in democratic futility, was a pal of Mary-Alice, my sister and our new junior partner, and her husband, Dr. David Paul. Moffat had contacted us through Mary-Alice about producing a catalogue of his art collection, which he evidently intended to send on tour to raise money for his wife’s charitable foundation, something to do with children. However, first thing that morning a man named Woody Getz, who’d said he was Mr. Moffat’s manager, had called to say that something had come up and Mr. Moffat couldn’t make it.

“How lucky for you,” Bobbi said again, when I told her.