

Patricia M. Muhammad
presents

THE SPEAKEASY MURDERS

Interesting Facts

Helen Williams. A young coloured detective who is serious about her case assignments as much as she is about her coffee. She works in a small precinct in Chicago during the 1920s. Her personality is soft-spoken and bashful, but when it comes to her work, she is serious and assertive.

1. The author intentionally created the protagonist as mild-mannered two highlight what most would consider the rare and unlikelihood of there being a detective such as her during this time. The 1920s was highly characterized by underground criminal organizations, both on the black and white sides of town. During the early decades of the 20th century there was a prosecuted, a coloured woman who worked to bring down mob bosses. She worked for the State of New York and her role was hidden in the background of one scene in the HBO series 'Boardwalk Empire'. Her name was Eunice Carter. Helen Williams, though fictional, parallel this real person though Williams was a detective instead of an attorney and she was younger and married to an Anglo Brit.

While Detective Helen Williams works in the station house, she wields one special object in her investigative arsenal, her magnifying glass. She uses it for its practical purpose, primarily to search for details in her case files she may have overlooked otherwise. The magnifier is an heirloom from her paternal forbear. Helen does not speak much of its significance, but the author narrates one or two facts. The magnifying glass was one of the first pieces of equipment her grandfather obtained when he started his professional career. Her grandfather Alden was one of the first 'coloured' physicians in the United States at the turn of the 19th century.

2. The author fashioned Alden's narrative after one of her own ancestors, a 'coloured' man who became the first coloured physician in one state, who was a civil rights activist, and who was also an entrepreneur. His life and that of one of his offspring have been the topic of that state's historical society.

Pearls became known as the part of the flapper dress along with other pilings of jewelry. Oft-times the flapper wore elaborate and long string of pearls which would dangle and move just as much as the sway of their dresses.

3. The author notes that pearls are varying cut, value and size. Of the real pearls, freshwater pearls are considered most common. Pearls were considered a staple during the 1950s as well and generally as a part of Southern culture for the cultured young lady. The 1920s made the pearls more common as part of counterculture during this decade. Detective Helen Williams had always been part of the world 'above'. When she adorns herself with the pearls, her *costume* to be a temporal fixture of the world 'below' is now complete. However, she never stays and destiny had always protected her from the elements that

dwelt down there. She and Patterson's job was to prevent any more of their acts from surfacing to above-ground society, before both worlds become nearly indistinguishable.

Detective Helen Williams and Detective Stephen Patterson discuss their strategy for their undercover investigation. He suggests that Helen accept some dance lessons from his sister, Ruby. Helen is hesitant, though she knows that it could be of some value. This is where Williams first meet Ruby. Ruby becomes a point of contact for Stephen in another way. On the night of the police raid, he loses his partner. However, Helen is well. Thaddeus has taken her home with him for safety. Ruby makes jest at the possibility of the Englishman and Helen. This was not to her brother's bemusement. The topic of their grandmother, Doletha, becomes part of their discussion.

4. The author named Detective Stephen Patterson's and Ruby's grandmother after a paternal forbear after searching for a name that appeared from that time, but also unique enough where a blurb about the fictional character would garner some attention. Though the author has never met this ancestor, the real Doletha is one of the daughters of her paternal grand-uncle.

On one occasion in which Helen accompanies her station house partner, Detective Stephen Patterson to the speakeasy, she is assaulted by a 'Negro' male with the assistance of an African male. Though she manages to escape from the grasp of her perpetrators with the help of Stephen and her love interest, Thaddeus, she was still molested and accosted. Some women are not so fortunate.

5. The author considered the lack of respect that the body of the black woman she has experienced in the United States. The voice of so many black women have been muted with the reality that other women helped to silence their cries for help or justice. For many black males in America, the body of the black woman has become solely a thing. Academic articles have highlighted the issue. Aspects of social media have brought attention to this woeful phenomena. Though in this case the detective was in a place she would likely not have been were it not for her investigation, so many women experience the same whether they are good or bad, regardless if it is day or night, whether they are present in the post office, the grocery store, a parking lot or a gas station. It has no bearing on what has become the detriment to so many innocent black women and girls' safety, the mentality of black males against them. The author considered these facts in incorporating the dreadful scenario that Detective Helen Williams barely escaped from.

Detective Helen Williams and Detective Stephen Patterson are assigned to solve a string of murders which they and their lieutenant have concluded originate from the local speakeasy. When Williams and her colleague go undercover, they are in essence local spies. They blend in among the usual patrons with their dress and learned dances. They observe and report their findings to assist in resolving criminal cases. After Helen transforms in appearance as a flapper, she encounters the dashing Englishman, Thaddeus. She is working her capacity as a local "spy" and now has become deeply involved with the Brit. Eventually they marry.

6. The author unintentionally created Detective Williams' character to parallel that of another famous American woman, the renowned Josephine Baker. Josephine Baker was born in the United States and became known for her one-woman show of scandalous dances. Helen is opposite. The detective is an introvert, bred to know only formal dances. However, even in the speakeasy she garners attention, both unwanted and unexpected. Williams never

desired to be the center of attention, until she realized that she became the focus of the Englishman's. During the war, Baker was an international spy, while Helen Williams was a spy on the local level. France revered Josephine Baker where she lived the rest of her days—only after marrying a Count, European. The author created Helen Williams to who was astute, well-intentioned with 'a way about her' that could only naturally lead her to marrying an Englishman. She too would soon leave the United States with her husband and have the life meant for them both—together.

Oft-times in traditional mystery/detective novels, the offenders are male. In *The Speakeasy Murders*, the head of the local underground criminal organization is female, though her henchmen are male. This is revealed in the final confrontation in which none knows who will leave alive, not even Thaddeus or Helen.

7. The author considered the facts of so many crimes within the United States regardless of the era. It is a well-established fact that mother sell their daughters into human trafficking and prostitution, as well as some of their male offspring. Sometimes it is their sisters and cousins who have compromised the safety of an innocent relation. In recent years, mounting voices of a particular movement characterized violation of women as solely a women versus men issue. Yet, women and girls are often accosted, raped, sexually abused, and physically attacked by other girls and women. The author did not consider the idea far from what statistics and victims' testimonials have asserted, the likelihood of females being part, if not in charge of a greater portion of the underground criminal element.

Those responsible for the murders and making Helen their next target do receive their ultimate form of justice. This, however, was after some innocents were maimed and murdered at their hands. Yet, the one person who they wished to kill leaves unscathed and has the life always meant for her. Helen Williams leaves her career after deciding that focusing on her family takes precedence. She also departs from the United States with her husband Thaddeus. Here is where they live in wedded bliss together—forever.