

Q & A With Patricia M. Muhammad, Author of *The Speakeasy Murders*, a Mystery/Detective Romance Novel

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE-United States, 2021-May-06— /ToStories/-Multi-genre fiction author Patricia M. Muhammad speaks about her first mystery/detective romance novel, *The Speakeasy Murders*.

1. Why did you decide to write a mystery novel? After writing several sci-fantasy, fantasy and a few historical romance novels, I wanted to try a different genre to challenge myself. *The Speakeasy Murders* was the result.
2. Why are there so few detective books with a woman as the main character? I think the literary landscape is evolving with regards to that. "Cozy" mysteries are popular and a lot of them are written by female authors who write women as main characters in their storylines.
3. Talk about the characters, both good and bad. Describe their personalities and motivations. Are they fully developed and emotionally complex? So for the first part of the book, most of the characters are of the local precinct, the protagonist's colleagues. The lieutenant is a no nonsense fellow but as the reader witnesses the detectives interact with him, you see a bit of his more amenable side emerge. Donnelly is the irritating co-worker that even when he means well, people have a difficult time being in his presence beyond what is necessary. Stephen Patterson is a little older than Helen Williams, the protagonist. They are station house brother and sister, but even he teases his colleague. Helen still keeps being herself, which is a good thing. The bad guys are of course the murderers and there are two bad characters who attack Helen at the speakeasy. They have no depth. Some people are just bad and these two males who attack Helen are just that.
4. What were the challenges of writing a book with a female central character who works in a male-dominated career in the 1920s and must constantly defend herself, especially while undercover at the speakeasy? Williams does not have to defend herself among her colleagues in the obvious sense. She is astute, diligent and focused. Her abilities garner the respect of her colleagues. Beyond being capable, she is stern when she defends her stance on how to conduct the investigations. This is her social armour at the precinct. It is not until she is at the speakeasy where she literally has to defend herself against her assailant and his accomplice. It demonstrates how certain black and African males back then and even now devalue the bodily integrity of the black woman and perceive her with a lack of inhumanity. Even after the Englishman, Thaddeus, rescues her from further harm, she now wonders if she must defend herself. The events happened so quickly while she was still undercover where everyone is suspect. In spite of this, Thaddeus was able to prove himself to Helen naturally, just as your question implied that she did with her station house colleagues.
5. How did you devise the story and crime central to *The Speakeasy Murders*? Are they based on real events? I wanted to make a distinction between the 'regular' world and the underground world. In both places, crime occurs. So the murders had a two-fold effect. They drew the detectives out from station house to the dumping field to follow the clues as to the immediate cause of death. The homicides then lured the undercover detectives (by order of the lieutenant) to leave the above ground world to the underground one. Since it was the 1920s, organized crime was popular and so was *The Cotton Club*, so I naturally thought of a speakeasy. It represents the

undercurrent of 1920s Chicago, while the station house and where Thaddeus, Helen, and Stephen reside were all part of the world above.

Crime writers embed hidden clues, slipping them in casually, almost in passing. Did you pick them out, or were you...clueless? Since I usually write as I progress, I didn't slip any clues in. I was not sure how I would lead the story to the unveiling of the culprits. I did put certain people in place wherein the reader may assume these were the perpetrators of the string of murders. Other than this, I think the speakeasy itself was the lead-in to the reveal, not anyone person.

Talk about the twists and turns—those surprising plot developments that throw everything you think you've figured out into disarray. Do they enhance the story, add complexity, or build suspense? I hoped what I mentioned in the previous answer enhanced the story, providing depth to the perception of only fancy dress, dance crazes, and the like. Beneath this veil of cultural rebellion, there lies a human darkness. It was witnessed by the patrons, including Thaddeus and Helen, while they were at the speakeasy.

6. Can you point to a passage in the book that you enjoyed that displayed both Thaddeus and Helen's personalities?

“Get off of me...Release me at once.” Williams was about to call for Stephen. The male smacked his left hand against her mouth and began to unzip his pants. The American drunkard began to smile as alcohol dribbled down the side of his lower face from the corner of his mouth. Helen could not yell. He muffled her. The detective couldn't kick because the Negro male pushed his body further forward. She knew combat moves but she was pressed against the wall, trapped. He kept trying to separate her legs. The African took his right fist and pounded it into his left open hand.

“Come here, you...release me? Oh, you're one of those uppity coloured gals...” He had a grimace on his face which Helen quickly discerned that if she did not do something else soon she would be thoroughly raped and possibly killed.

“Give it to her boss...” the African said.

Helen's left hand was still free. She smacked her assailant.

“You will pay for that as well.” Helen bit his hand. “You have to try harder than that.” She did. The detective punched him with her left arm bent, causing him to stumble. He dropped his hand from his mouth. Then she kicked him in the center between his legs.

“Stephen...Stephen—help!” He was still in front of her. Patterson heard her somehow through the music. He burst into the room. When the offender heard him enter, that's when she kicked him directly in the groin again.

“What...what happened?” He saw the Negro man cowering where Helen injured him. “Did he...did he?” Helen pulled her cardigan back onto her shoulders.

“No, but he tried...Stephen he was trying to—”

“I know what he was attempting to do. I have seen it far too often. Stephen began to punch and kick him. Then he pulled him up and punched him again. Then struck him with a left hook. Thaddeus was waiting for Helen to return and when she didn't, he noticed the crowds forming outside of the one room. He ran towards it. The African patron tried to run and leave. Thaddeus tripped him hard, and upon impact, the African's skull split at his forehead. Stephen couldn't stop. The room was too

closed in for him. Far too much pressure...he had to protect Helen. The walls were closing in tighter, the space to an even smaller one. One hit, two hits. A tooth from the Negro's mouth fell out. Stephen gave him two black eyes. Someone tossed Patterson a blade. It wasn't Williams. He sliced the assailant on his left leg after throwing him to the ground. He turned to his side. Stephen cut him on his back. Then he laid on it to shield it from Patterson. That didn't stop him. Patterson sliced him on both arms and cut the tips of both of his pinky fingers. When he heard his sister's assailant grunt, it made him angrier. He didn't want to hear anything from him. He tossed the blade towards whatever direction it was originally thrown. "Don't you or your cronies ever," He implied male and female but at the moment focused on the one who laid before him. Stephen kicked the man on the side of his neck, "Ever," he kicked him in the chest making the offender gurgle blood, "...come here or near her again." Stephen kicked him one last time in the head.

Helen reunited with Thaddeus. "We have to go now," he said. He pulled on her right arm. She pulled away from him. "But I have to—Stephen..."

"Your brother can care for himself. Right now I need to take care of you..."

Helen looked at Thaddeus and back to the room. She knew he was right. Williams needed to get out there alongside with him. She looked to the blood pouring from the center of the African's head as it began to stain the hardwood floors.

"...but..." Helen said.

"Now...!" Thaddeus picked Helen up as she kicked the air in confusion and concern for her brother in arms. Some of the patrons patted Stephen on the back and his arm.

"You need to go, buddy..." Stephen was still a bit dazed. "We'll take care of the rest."

He knew he needed to find Williams. He stepped outside of the room and scanned the main floor. She was gone. Thaddeus was gone as well.

'I hope she is with him,' he thought. Stephen rushed away from the speakeasy and jumped into his car. Helen rode with Thaddeus, but he refused to take her to her flat after dumping her into his passenger seat. He turned his head back to his right and lifted his right arm to brace the seat. As he backed the car away, Helen sank her head into her right hand, rubbing her index finger against her brow.

"Stephen..."

"Stephen can take care of himself. Someone needs to take care of you."

"You are going the wrong way...I live on...you have to take me to my flat."

"I will take you in the morning. Someone may follow us tonight. You are going home with me tonight." His words confused her. She cannot..it was just not proper. She had to accept that she was in extenuating circumstances. Besides she already understood that one way or another, they would be together, it was just happening now. When she thought about it she didn't mind. Now she just wanted sleep.

Thaddeus and Helen arrived at his flat. She knew she lived on the good side of the coloured town, but even in the late night, she recognized the name of his street. He did not live too far from her. He exited and shut his door quickly and ran to Helen's side. "Do not tarry for too long, Helen," he said. The detective sat there. Her new beau looked at her hands, grabbing onto the dark object. "I will pick you up again." She believed him.

"I am sure you would," Helen mumbled. When she looked at him with all of his handsome vigor, she still denied him—until he leaned in towards the passenger side.

“Alright...Thaddeus, enough. I'm going with you.” He only stepped back far enough to allow her to reach her legs out. Thaddeus didn't expect her to run, but he needed to be close to her, even if she was not in a pleasant mood. He had to stand in front of her to open the locks to the door. Immediately, he pushed it open with his right arm, now standing to Helen's right. “Hurry in. It's cold outside. That cardigan of yours can only do but so much.”

'Why do so many people hate these lovely cardigans,' Helen thought. She stepped just on the other side of the threshold, which Thaddeus didn't expect. When he closed the door, he knocked her off her balance with his right side. Helen stumbled forward, but the Brit was quick. He grabbed her around her waist from behind with his large, strong arms. When he sat her up and only after she appeared stable, he moved from behind her. Thaddeus hung his jacket. Helen stood with her arms crossed in front of her still standing directly in front of the door. Her feet ached. She took her shoes off. Her host left to get something to drink and returned to the living room. He extended his left arm for Helen to take a seat. There was a single plush chair and a settee from her to choose from as well.

“You can stand there if you wish, but you are not leaving here tonight.” He brought out ice water and iced tea. “I particularly do not drink this kind of tea. I've heard it is quite popular in the South.” Then he smiled. Helen almost buckled from her knees. She was still rather thirsty. “I think your bashfulness is quite endearing.” Helen smiled, just a little.

“Thank you...”

“Join me, please Helen. Anyways, unless you are a bat you cannot sleep standing up.” The detective walked towards him. He stood halfway, smoothing the front of his shirt with his left hand. Thaddeus had his charming ways, but he entangled her most with his polite mannerisms towards her.

“You usually stay up this late?” She drank some water quietly.

“No...but I usually do not have...” He smiled and looked down at the coffee table.

“I see...” She placed the glass on a coaster, careful not to spill any. Helen leaned back against the sofa while Thaddeus opted for one of the chairs. Suddenly, Williams' lethargy overtook her. Her eyes began to close though she still moved her mouth. She thought she was engaging in a conversation though no sounds emerged. Helen's hands fell to either side of her. Her knees were knobbed towards one another. Thaddeus hovered over her. Williams could feel his shadow but was unable to respond. The Brit picked her up as he did before and carried her to his bedroom. The detective's arms laid listlessly towards the floor until he laid her on his bed. For some reason, she reacted as if she were in her own flat and reached for a couple of pillows. Thaddeus pulled the blankets over her, then returned to the living room. He laid on the sofa until he could quiet his thoughts of Helen. Her gentleman was finally able to fall asleep.

The scene, and its transition to Helen and Thaddeus being alone until they settle in for the night, has violence, gender bias, and action. Then as Williams and her rescuer are alone, caring and sweet humour. This is what I like most about it.

7. It is the 1920s. The handsome Anglo Brit basically saves Helen from being a victim of further crime at the hands of a black male and an African one. Do you not find this scene controversial? Did it this scenario naturally unfold in this manner? The

1920s was controversial. Race matters then and it wasn't always black vs. white, just like the times now. Racial politics and violence against women are continuous issues that need to be addressed even today. To say it is 'controversial' is to deny the reality that many black women deal with at the hands of their black male counterpart. A woman's humanity and dignity should not be considered controversial solely because it is upheld for one of the least protected ones in this category—that is a black woman. Other than this, Thaddeus did not care what colour or race the person was who was attacking his woman. His thoughts were that of a man whose affection for soon-to-be wife was only to secure her away from their attack and into her arms. That was his sole purpose and it was not only for that moment; it would be forever. Thankfully, he succeeded.

8. Do you try more to be original or to deliver to readers what they want? In the broader sense, I write what comes naturally. This I hope is original but we all are influenced, even subconsciously, by our experiences. I do make an effort to write my own stories. It seems this is easiest when I write sci-fi/fantasy and fantasy romance novels.
9. Do you write blurbs for other writer's books? No, but I heard of authors doing this.
10. Do you think you would ever write a mystery series? I am unsure about this. Thus far, I have written two mystery/detective romance novels and both are standalones.

The Speakeasy Murders* is now available for purchase as an ebook from these online retailers:

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Apple Books: N/A
DriveThru Fiction: N/A
Lulu: N/A

About the Author: Patricia M. Muhammad is a multi-genre fiction author. She writes in science-fiction/fantasy, fantasy, contemporary romance crossover, historical romance and mystery/detective romance genres. Patricia often includes multi-racial characters and interracial relationships in her books. She has written 20 novels. Patricia is currently based in the United States.

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* CONTENT WARNING: This book is a work of fiction. However, the author intended to create characters and settings historically accurate to the era it takes place in, the racially tumultuous 1920s. Certain terms used as racial descriptions now considered archaic, outdated or even offensive are used to reflect the past usage by both black and white Americans of that era. Particular themes regarding race, references to certain crimes such as murder and sexual assault are included as part of the fictional plot. The

author provides this content description for any potential reader who may consider any of these subject matters or references too sensitive to consider.