

Dear XXXX,

Mystery writer Bunny Prescott receives an envelope with no return address. It contains a photo of the body of a beautiful murdered woman—a photo Bunny has seen before. Fifty-five years ago, in 1945. Believing that her estranged childhood friend, Ceola, may have mailed it to her, Bunny writes to her: I remember your last words to me ... “Bunny, you’re a murderer.” To this day, I believe it. I really do.

Alternating between Bunny’s and Ceola’s accounts, the story behind the photo unfolds during the summer of ’45. Jay Greenwood, a wounded war photographer, has returned to Royal Oak, VA, from the front in Belgium. He shows the photo to his friends Bunny, then a small-town society girl of twenty, and Ceola, a headstrong tomboy of twelve whose brother, Robbie, is missing in action. Jay tells the girls that he stumbled on the corpse in the nearby woods. But when he leads them to the scene, it has vanished. They soon discover that a local woman, Lily Vellum, is missing.

The mystery of Lily Vellum casts a spell over young Ceola, echoing the salacious stories in the pulp detective magazines that her missing brother read to her before her parents, fearing Robbie’s homosexual tendencies, forced him to enlist “to make a man of him.” Jay too mourns the loss of Robbie, his friend and secret lover.

The three investigate the murder on their own, and Bunny finds a clue that takes her to wartime Washington, DC, where she is forced to come to terms with the truth about Jay: his homosexuality. Her spiteful response to this revelation sets off a series of events that brings violence and tragedy for Jay, and decades of estrangement between the two women.

Reunited in old age, Bunny and Ceola confront each other about Jay’s fate and discover that the photo of Lily is the key to a dark secret—a secret that gives them a deeper understanding of the psychological toll the war took on the young men they loved and on themselves.

Dodging and Burning is unique in that it addresses the love between two men through the compelling viewpoints of two straight female characters, bridging the gap between the niche of gay and lesbian literature and the popular mystery genre.

I have an MA in literature from Bread Loaf, completed my MFA in fiction from GMU, and edited a literary magazine called Phoebe. *Dodging and Burning* placed as a quarter finalist in the Amazon Breakthrough Novel Award, and I’ve been working on it since and feel that I have now brought it to a new level.

I look forward to hearing from you and hope you will be willing to look at the entire 95,000 word manuscript.

Thanks so much for your time.

Sincerely,

-John

Historical Crime Author John Copenhaver and Finding Meaning in the Process

Historical Crime Author John Copenhaver joins Queries, Qualms, & Quirks this week to discuss getting an MFA, querying via snail mail, changes in the mystery genre landscape, what happens if you never get published, and the importance of forming relationships in the industry.

John Copenhaver's historical crime novel, *Dodging and Burning*, won the 2019 Macavity Award for Best First Mystery Novel and garnered Anthony, Strand Critics, Barry, and Lambda Award nominations. His second novel, *The Savage Kind*, was just released. He writes a crime fiction review column for Lambda called "Blacklight," and cohosts on the House of Mystery Radio Show. He lives in Richmond, VA.

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