

Excerpt from Death Had A Yellow Thumb

By Joan Del Monte

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“Yeah, saffron, the spice. Turns out the stuff is some kind of red gold, the same price as gold, and there’s a whole industry moving it and selling it and smuggling it, and that’s what they’re stealing the boats for, to move the saffron. And now somebody’s adulterating the saffron, and selling fake saffron.”

“Wait a minute. Let’s finish about Finch before we start hallucinating. After you left Finch, you just went home. Alone. So you don’t have anybody that was with you for the time in question.”

“Yeah,” Peridot nodded. “Well, except for Jerry Accalanes, of course.”

“Except for who?” Arnold put down his pen. “Peridot, this is like pulling teeth one at a time.”

“Jerry Accalanes, the insurance broker.” Peridot roared. “You only hear what you want to hear. I already told you, I’m damn sure I told you, I had to make a claim for the Sailfish.”

“And how long was he with you, this Accalanes, making this claim? And I need his phone number.” Arnold was scribbling.

“He needed all kinds of stuff, a copy of the bill of sale, a copy of the slip rental, a photograph of the Sailfish. So I guess we were together about two hours.”

“Jesus, I’ll say this for you, Peridot,” Arnold sat back; “this is not how I expected this interview to go.”

“Because I didn’t kill Finch.”

“Is there any other little thing you want to tell me?”

“Remember Finch’s fingers? Remember they were yellow and everybody wanted to know why? Well, there’s a guy hangs out at The Sand Bar, up on 25th Street, and he’s got a lot of money and he doesn’t work and he drives a big Caddie and his fingers and thumb are yellow. Guy’s name is Amin Noor. I think he’s running a ring which commandeers the boats, delivers the fake saffron, then sinks the boats and kills the owners. Finch’s mistake was he convinced them he was the owner of the Sailfish.”

Tok Arnold looked at him. “Peridot,” he folded his hands, interlacing his fingers across a gut becoming more prominent, “Explain this to me. Why the hell would they sink the boats? If they’re smuggling saffron into Pedro, why wouldn’t they keep using the boats? It can’t be very efficient for them to keep having to steal boats and kill owners and then they’re blowing up the boats they already stole.”

“I don’t know,” Peridot said. “I haven’t got to thinking about that part yet. The thing is, I can’t ask Noor questions, but you can.”

Arnold looked at Peridot. “You know what? To show you my basic public servant cooperation, I’ll go talk to this Noor.”

“Good. Now I’m going home.”

“That leaves this kid was on the boat when Finch left, this Esau Landseer.” Arnold said.

“No,” Peridot shook his head. “Because he has an alibi too. He was teaching some kind of computer course for old farts. I called the school. You can call them.”

“What alibi,” Arnold snapped up his head, “Peridot, what in the hell do you think you’re doing, asking people their alibi? This is a police matter, you get it? I don’t need you rolling

around screwing up an investigation I'm conducting, like a loose cannon, much less you and Santuzzi, which makes two loose cannons."

"I just asked him."

"I know what you asked him, and you got no right asking people where they were. You got no right speculating about Noor, either."

"And the fact that I told you all these guys have yellow fingers--"

"Is suggestive, but nothing definite. What, you got a boy detective kit for Christmas, when you were a kid?"

"I had enough of this. I want to go home."

"Just stay the hell out of my investigation, clear?"

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Just what it sounds like it means."

"You don't expect me to keep asking questions about the Sailfish disappearing? Because I'm strung out here, making payments, and you don't seem real interested in finding my boat."

"Look, enough said, all right? Now, I've given you the word. You don't ask people their alibi. You don't ask Noor what he's doing. I can charge you with interfering with a murder investigation and that's exactly what I'll do. I don't need an argument with you every time. You now have the official police directive. You've been told, and that's it."

"All right, all right."

"If you have any more ideas about Finch, drop them. It's being taken care of."

"I said all right." Peridot stood up. He felt like throwing Arnold through the room's one window. "You're going to handle it. Just like you handled the theft of the Sailfish. Some fat chance."

Arnold straightened all the papers on the table. "Sit down, I'm not finished. This is not the time for me to be listening to your view of the competence of the police force. Meanwhile, while I'm investigating, you don't leave town. Including fishing."

"What? How the hell do I make a living?"

"Beats me," Arnold said. "But no way are you getting on a boat and sailing out of Pedro. We can hold you here at the station for questioning, for 36 hours. So you can be in jail and not fish or out of jail and not fish. And I'm only letting you choose because maybe I made a mistake with you. Maybe. So, which do you pick?"

"Oh, Jesus." Peridot dropped his head in his hands.