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# A Wild Surge of Guilty Passion: A Novel (English Edition)



*Par Ron Hansen*

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**Par Ron Hansen : A Wild Surge of Guilty Passion: A Novel (English Edition)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Wild Surge of Guilty Passion: A Novel (English Edition):

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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurFrom the acclaimed author of Atticus and Mariette in Ecstasy comes a stylish novel set in the hard-drinking, fast-living New York City of the Jazz Age that follows two lovers in a torrid affair on an arc of murder and sexual self-destruction. Based on a real case whose lurid details scandalized Americans in 1927 and sold millions of newspapers, acclaimed novelist Ron Hansens latest work is a tour de force of erotic tension and looming violence. Trapped in a loveless marriage, Ruth Snyder is a voluptuous, reckless, and altogether irresistible woman who wishes not only to escape her husband but that he dieand the sooner

the better. No less miserable in his own tedious marriage is Judd Gray, a dapper corset-and-brassiere salesman who travels the Northeast peddling his wares. He meets Ruth in a Manhattan diner, and soon they are conducting a white-hot affair involving hotel rooms, secret letters, clandestine travels, and above all, Ruths increasing insistence that Judd kill her husband. Could he do it? Would he? What follows is a thrilling exposition of a murder plan, a police investigation, the lovers attempt to escape prosecution, and a final reckoning for both of them that lays bare the horror and sorrow of what they have done. Dazzlingly well-written and artfully constructed, this impossible-to-put-down story marks the return of an American master known for his elegant and vivid novels that cut cleanly to the essence of the human heart, always and at once mysterious and filled with desire.

Extrait ONE ART EDITOR SLAIN She woke to a slow thudding on her bedroom door. She was Lorraine Snyder, aged nine. She had wasted Saturday night with her parents at their friends card party and she had gotten home only after two o'clock Sunday morning. It was now just over five hours later. March 20th, 1927. She fell asleep again, and then she heard a louder thudding and her mother called in a muffled way, Lora. Lora, its me. She got up, slumped over to the door, found it mysteriously locked from the hallway, and opened it with a skeleton key that was hanging on a string. Ruth Snyder was lying on the hallway floor in a short green satin nightgown that was hiked up to her thighs. She had been softly drumming the door with her head. White clothesline was wrapped many times around her ankles, and her wrists were tied behind her back. Lorraine screamed, Mommy! What happened? She knelt to free the mans handkerchief that gagged her mothers mouth, and she heard Ruth say, Dont untie me yet. Go over and get Mrs. Mulhauser. Harriet Mulhauser was filling an electric coffee percolator from the kitchen tap when she heard the front doorbell ring. The pretty blonde girl from across the street was there on the porch, still in her sailor pajamas and slippers. Wide-eyed and frightened and breathless. My mother needs you, she said. Mrs. Mulhauser found a Snyder house that seemed to have been ransacked, with sofa cushions on the floor, curtains yanked down, and books and silverware strewn. Upstairs she found Mrs. Snyder helplessly lying on the south end of the hallway floor, still tied up. As Harriet knelt to unknot the ropes, Ruth told her in a frantic, disjointed way that the house had been burglarized. She had gotten whacked on the head by a giant Italian thief and she had fainted. She had no idea what happened to Albert. Would Harriet check to see if he was all right? Mrs. Mulhauser looked to the north end of the hallway, where the door was ajar. She felt it improper to go into a bedroom with the husband still in it, and there was something too eerily quiet there. She even thought she smelled something foul. She sent Lorraine to get her husband. Louis Mulhauser was in his gray wool church-service suit and getting the Sunday New York Times from the front sidewalk when he saw the Snyder girl running to him. We need you, she said. She was crying as she took him by the hand. The Snyder house had been constructed by the same real estate firm and was just like his. Upstairs, Mrs. Snyder was still on the floor and sagging into the hug of his wife. Yard-lengths of clothesline were at Ruths bare feet. Although her face was not wet, she made crying sounds. Look in on the mister, Harriet solemnly said, and turned Louis with a tilt of her head. Louis went alone into the master bedroom. Clothing was scattered and the contents of opened drawers were heaped on the floor. A jewelry case seemed to have been looted. There was a strong chemical smell and Albert Snyder was in his flannel nightshirt and lying mostly on his chest in the twin bed closest to the door. His head seemed arched back in agony and was turned away from the entrance. His wrists were tied behind him with a white hand towel, and his ankles tied with a silk necktie. A .32-caliber revolver was beside his back; his flipped-open wallet had been flung near a bureau. Mr. Mulhauser sidled around between the twin beds to see a horrible, florid, lifeless face that still seemed to be straining away from a chloroformed blue bandana of the sort that farmers used. Alberts head had been gashed more than once and his pillowcase was sodden and maroon with his drying blood. Worms of chloroformed cotton plugged his nostrils and a fist of chloroformed cotton bulged from his mouth. And a gold mechanical pencil had been used to twist a tourniquet of picture wire so tight around his neck that it furrowed into the skin. When Louis Mulhauser exited the bedroom, Ruth Snyder was still lying on the floor and snuggling Lorraine as she petted the girls hair. Its bad, he said. Ill go call the police. Oh no! Ruth screamed. Albert! Darling! She seemed to want to go to her husband but Lorraine could feel she was holding back and she finally just stayed as she was and squeezed her daughter even closer. The girl had never heard her father called darling. He was not the darling kind. Mr. Mulhauser hurried downstairs to the foyer telephone and found George Colyer, a friendly widower in his late sixties, letting himself in. Colyers house was just behind the Snyders corner home. Colyer said, I saw you with the girl and figured something was wrong. Alberts been killed. Oh my gosh! Mr. Mulhauser spoke to the police and then, as Mrs. Mulhauser took Lorraine across the street to the shelter of their home, he and George Colyer lifted up Alberts lovely

wife and helped her into Lorraines bedroom, the one farthest from the murder. A soft rain was falling when the first policemen got to the address and found a cream-yellow, green-trimmed, two-and-a-half-story Dutch Colonial house that faced west on the corner of 222nd Avenue and 93rd Road in Queens Village, New York, about fifteen miles east of midtown Manhattan. The tawny front yard was just six feet deep, a large and still-leafless elm tree stood between the front sidewalk and the curb, and behind the house was a sparrow bath that Albert had helped Lorraine create with a saucepan on a post. The first-floor north wing held a sunroom and what was called a music room because of its player piano, and the south wing contained the dining room and kitchen. Just south of that was a trellis archway woven with wisteria vines and the freestanding one-car garage that Albert had carpentered himself. Upstairs in the northern master bedroom was the victim, Albert Edward Snyder, a muscular, sandy-haired magazine editor in his midforties, of slightly below-average height and just under two hundred pounds. Because of the chaos in the house and the extreme thoroughness of the killers, the Queens policemen immediately construed the crime as an assassination rather than a break-in that went awry. The policemen told Mrs. Snyder nothing about Mr. Snyders condition and noted that she didnt seem curious about it. Homicide and burglary detectives were summoned and soon the house was filled with scowling men, including journalists, fingerprint experts, and a police photographer with a Graflex camera. Mrs. Snyder went into the bathroom to cleanse her face with Noxzema, brush her teeth with Ipana, and fix her marcelled and very blonde hair. But she told a policeman she was there because she had a horrific headache. Dr. Harry Hansen, their family physician, was called to treat her, but he could find no skull contusion or swelling so he just gave her some Bayer aspirin and left. With a handshake, a solemn man introduced himself to Mrs. Snyder as Assistant District Attorney William Gautier. Hed been called to the scene because he lived just a few blocks away. Stiffly offering his condolences for her loss, but not admitting that Albert was dead, he interviewed Ruth for fifteen minutes and found shed married Albert Snyder in 1915. He was thirteen years older and the art editor of Motor Boating magazine, handling page layouts and a half-dozen freelance illustrators. Could there have been a motive other than burglary? he asked. Could anyone have been seeking some particular document or article? Ruth said she had no idea why the burglars seemed to have searched the house so thoroughly. She wasnt aware of secret papers or anything Albert could have hidden. Why? The house has been turned upside down, the assistant district attorney said. Its like the burglars were rummaging, not stealing. Like they were tossing things to give the appearance of burglary, when in fact murder was their sole intent. Ruth felt sure Albert had no enemies, though she recalled that at a card party three weeks earlier hed accused a stocky guy of stealing his wallet and its seventy-five dollars. The guy was named George Hough. A lot of fun but he could be loutish. About thirty years old. And last night, Ruth told Gautier, again in the home of Milton and Serena Fidgeon on Hollis Court Boulevard, and again at a card partycontract bridge, which she was lousy atAlbert got very drunk and ornery and there was another altercation, and George had told Ruth that hed like to kill the Old Crab. But of course, like she said, there had been a great deal of drinking and he was probably just fuming. She told Gautier that she and Albert were asleep when she heard a hallway floorboard squeak. She thought it was Lorraine and went out to see if she was okay, but suddenly Ruths throat was seized by a giant man who hit her hard over the head. Shed never seen the man before. Looked Italian, with a wide, black mustache. She then heard another man shout something in a language she couldnt understand, but maybe it was Italian, and she was about to get hit again when she fainted. She recalled nothing else from that time until she recovered consciousness around seven thirty that morning. No, she wasnt sure where George Hough lived. She guessed New Jersey since he talked about New Jersey a lot. She thought he mentioned he was staying in the Commercial Hotel in Jamaica that night because there were so few trains that late. She was asked if she owned things of high value, and she told Gautier there was a jewelry box that ought to contain some rings with precious gems, gold and silver brooches and bracelets, a magnificent pearl necklace, and four-carat diamond earrings. And shed hung a fox stole and a mink coat in the foyer closet. And she thought Albert generally carried a hundred dollars in his wallet. Why is there a handgun in the house? Al got it last year because of that guy who stole radios. The so-called Radio Burglar had killed a policeman and had just been executed in Sing Sing. Assistant District Attorney Gautier closed his notebook, again offered his sympathy, and sent detectives to interview Mr. M. C. Fidgeon on Hollis Court Boulevard, to seek out George Hough in Jamaricas Commercial Hotel, and to find Georges brother, Cecil, who lived, Ruth thought, in Far Rockaway. And then he invited in a gum-chewing stenographer to record Mrs. Snyders statement. Ruth smiled as she told the girl, I was a stenographer once. At Cosmopolitan magazine. Some neighbor ladies hunched at the front porch vestibule peering in, and when a policeman came to shoo them away, he was told a handsome

stranger in fine clothes was seen prowling around the Snyder house one night about two weeks earlier, and also there was a feeble-minded boy of nineteen who lived with his mother a few blocks away and had been caught peeking into first-floor windows. And Creedmoor Psychiatric Hospital was just a half mile to the east. The policeman thanked the ladies for the information and crime reporters ran with that gossip in their initial stories. Dr. Howard Neal, the Queens County medical examiner, got there within the hour and established that Albert Snyder was indeed dead, probably six hours gone in fact; then he waited for the assistant district attorney to finish with Mrs. Snyder and exit Lorraines bedroom before Dr. Neal invited himself in and carefully shut the door. She was willing to get out of the green satin nightgown for his examination, but Neal told her that wouldnt be necessary. She seemed to him a healthy, very attractive, voluptuous woman with ice-blue eyes and blonde hair. Her lilting, velvety voice was so fetching that he found himself leaning toward her as she spoke. She told him she would be thirty-two in one week, on March 27th. She had invited sixteen friends to a Saturday birthday party. Albert, she said, was forty-four. She said she fainted often and she had a tricky heart. She wondered if she had epilepsy like her late father. Worth checking out, he said. But Im only here relative to the crime. She claimed again that she had been almost strangled and hit over the head by a burglar, but like Dr. Hansen, he could find no contusions of the skull, no bruising of the throat, no injury of any kind. She said the attack probably occurred around two thirty in the morning, that she had then conked out, and that she woke up five hours later, gagged and with her wrists and ankles tied with clothesline. Had you been drinking? She shook her head. I have a hard time handling alcohol. I get sick. Had you been sexually molested? She hesitated, then said, No. Are you a smoker? No. Was your husband? Cigars sometimes. Why? It helps the police. She got a worried look. You fainted? he asked. Yes. And were out for five hours? She nodded, but uncertainly. And then she smiled with perfect teeth in a perfectly lovely way, as if she had just noticed how handsome and intriguing and gallant he was. With a softer tone that he crazily thought of as smooth and sweet as butterscotch, Ruth said, You seem extra curious about that. And he found himself wanting to help her out. Well, its unprecedented, Mrs. Snyder, the medical examiner said. You faint, you fall down, blood flows into your head again, and you generally wake up within five or ten minutes. She had the look of a child learning. Still, thats what happened. And then what? She said she had scooted along the floor to get help from Lorraine. Dr. Neal found no chafing on the skin of the wrists or ankles where the presumably snug clothesline bindings had been. And he was surprised to find that yard-long lengths of quarter-inch rope had been wrapped four times around the ankles as if she were a movie damsel in distress. Are there any more questions? she asked. And now it was he who was defensive. Yes, he said, but not from me. Seeming about to swoon, Ruth said, I have to lie down now. Im emotional and exhausted. The head of the investigation was New York City Police Commissioner George V. McLaughlin, a hale, hearty, fashionably dressed Irishman of forty, who would soon leave elective office to become a banking executive with the Brooklyn Trust Company. He got upstairs just before noon and peeked into Lorraines room to view Mrs. Snyder just as Dr. Neal was leaving. Shes a looker, isnt she? McLaughlin said, and Dr. Neal seemed embarrassed. Walking into the master bedroom, the medical examiner showed McLaughlin how a blunt instrument had caused two lacerations above the right ear on Albert Snyders head and a laceration on the skull near his cowlick. A hand or hands had caused seven abrasions on his neck as he was choked; he seemed to have been socked in the nose; he was suffocating on chloroform; and common picture wire had been used to strangle him. So what actually caused his death? McLaughlin asked. The choice is yours. Either suffocation, strangulation, or even blunt-force trauma. The assailants were thorough. A lot of wasted effort if you just want to kill a guy. And the loaded thirty-two-caliber on the bed. Why would burglars leave a gun behind? And then McLaughlin looked at the photographer. You get all your shots? Heading downstairs now. McLaughlin waved in the coroners men to collect the victim, told the policemen in the room to scour it and make an inventory, and then he followed the photographer downstairs. Albert Snyders cadaver was sheeted, carried downstairs, and laid onto a gurney that was rolled out to a hearse belonging to the Harry A. Robbins Morgue on 161st Street in Jamaica. Hundreds of Queens residents were out there, watching the Robbins men haul Mr. Snyder away. A photographer had climbed high up the front yards elm tree with a Kodak box camera and was taking pictures of Ruth answering over and over again the same questions. And a journalist roved among the horde in the yard collecting anecdotes about the Snyders. He found a twelve-year-old boy heading to church who remembered hitting a baseball that crashed through the Snyders kitchen window, and Mr. Snyder had run out of the house after him, crazy with rage, chasing him inside his house and spanking the boy with his big hands in front of the boys frightened father. And George Colyer told the journalist that all the neighbors liked Ruth because of her great love of fun and

laughter. But shes a cut below Snyder. He was a fine fellow. You just couldnt help but admire him. Colyer hesitated before he judged it tolerable to state, I would have to say they were mismatched. Mrs. Josephine Brown, Ruths mother, was a practical nurse who had worked Saturday night and Sunday morning in Kew Gardens, caring for an invalid in his apartment at Kew Hall. She was a tall, sour, regal widow in nurses whites, a brown woolen cloak, and owlsh spectacles. She seemed genuinely upset by Albert Snyders death, and once shed gotten over the sorrow and tears she spoke frankly if formally in the metronomic cadence of a Swedish immigrant. She gave her maiden name as Josephine Anderson and said she also had a son, Andrew, who lived in the Bronx and was two years older than May. Whos May? McLaughlin asked. Oh, Im sorry; Ruth. We named her Mamie Ruth when she was born, but she decided she was May when she was grown some. We all of us got so used to that we never gave it up when she changed again to Ruth. And now I hear the men calling her Tommy. Whys that? Oh, I guess shes one of the boys, like they say. The police commissioner asked Mrs. Brown to go with him upstairs to the middle bedroom she slept in, just above the front porch vestibule and just south of Albert and Ruths room. She was asked if she noticed anything different. She saw an empty quart bottle of Tom Dawson Whisky on the floor between the white Swedish chiffonier and her pink velour reading chair and she said she had no idea how it got there. And Alberts electricians pliers seemed to have been shoed underneath the twin bed. Would your son-in-law have been working with pliers up here? Oh heavens no. Albert respected my privacy. Even looked away when he walked down the hallway. Could you give me an idea of what kind of man he was? Seeking to say nothing ill of the dead, she told McLaughlin only good things about her son-in-law: that he was smart and artistic, fond of classical music, strong and handy and industrious, a good provider and avid sportsman with lots of hobbies and with a hearty, infectious laugh. But he was hotheaded and older than his age in his habits and customs, and Ruth was, after all, still vital and young. Was there marital discord? McLaughlin asked. Ruths mother frowned. My English aint so good sometimes. Your daughter and Albert. Were they unhappy? Oh, just like most folks. McLaughlin felt confident she had nothing to do with the murder so he just called the invalid she cared for in Kew Gardens, heard Mr. William F. Code confirm that the nurse had been there the whole night, then walked Mrs. Brown across to the Mulhausers to be with the granddaughter. But before leaving the neighbors home, McLaughlin guided Lorraine into a parlor. Sitting left of her on a davenport sofa, he went over her memories of the card party Saturday night and the chaos on Sunday. Because there were no other children at the party, she said shed just read Motion Picture magazines alone or with her mother while the grown-ups played cards. There was yelling at the party, but Daddy always got that way when there was drinking. She fell asleep in the car going home and couldnt recall getting into bed, it was so late and she was so tired. And then she found her mother on the hallway floor and all tied up that morning. Was your bedroom door often locked at night? She shook her head. Was it your mother who locked it? I guess so, Lorraine said. She was the one who took care of me. And not your father? She shrugged. Daddys always busy with things. McLaughlin noticed she used the present tense. Shed not been told. Are they happy with each other, your mommy and daddy? I dont know. Theyre always arguing. Will you tell me again what your mother said when she was found? She told him. Would you hazard a guess as to why your mother wouldnt want you untying her hands and feet? And why she had you get Mrs. Mulhauser first? Lorraine gave it some thought and said, She wanted a grownup to see how she was. And why would that be? Because it was important. Important to whom? You. The police. Clever girl, McLaughlin said, and gently patted her left knee as he got up. On the first floor of the Snyder home, burglary detectives found Chambly silverware, a Lalique vase, and some Baccarat crystal of value, but winter coats had been yanked pointlessly from their closet hangers and the floral chintz sofa cushions seemed tossed. Even a seascape oil painting signed by Albert Snyder had been lifted from its hook and sailed across the room. A crime reporter asked, What could these guys have been looking for? And another answered, My wife finds pocket change under the sofa cushions every time she vacuums. On the kitchen table, Scotch whisky filled a water glass that was so gummy with fingerprints it hardly needed graphite dusting. And a dollar bill was beside it like a bartenders tip. The shoes of reporters kept whanging into the pots and pans and cutlery that were strewn on the kitchens linoleum floor. The southern door out to the garage was not jimmed and the front door and storm windows had been locked, so it seemed the assailants had been let in. And in a pinkish seashell ashtray there were half-finished Sweet Caporal cigarettes. A detective said, Werent exactly covering their tracks, were they? The first and second floors of the house were feminine in their interior decoration, with little sign of a male presence, but upstairs in the attic there were old furniture pieces, boxes of Christmas ornaments and odds and ends organized and labeled in Alberts block printing, and also an overstuffed chair and a chrome

pedestal cigar ashtray situated in front of the dormer storm windows, the right one still wedged out so his cigar smoke could escape. On the floor was the book *Deep Sea Fishing and Fishing Boats* by Edmund W. H. Holdsworth, 1874. Alberts other domain was the basement, where Detective Frank Heyner found a highly organized workshop with a homemade liquor still, a rack of fishing rods and reels, a sanded row-boat that seemed intended for priming and painting, a Johnson outboard motor, and a laundry chute that would let clothing from upstairs fall into a hamper. There Heyner found a bloodstained pillowcase. The overheating in the house indicated the furnace had been stoked with coal an hour or two before sunrise. Looking inside the furnace, he found only the French cuff of what he guessed had been a fine shirt but was now just ashes. And finally, in a box of tools, the detective found a brand-new five-pound sash weight that eased the lift in frame windows. Coal ash had been sprinkled on it, but blood could still be detected. Heyner collected the evidence. Upstairs that afternoon, Police Commissioner George McLaughlin was called to the telephone in the foyer. An investigator visiting the home of Milton C. Fidgeon told him that Ruths story checked out. Miltons hand had gone to his forehead and he had to sit down when he heard the news of the homicide. The party giver had said Albert could be cantankerous, a complex guy, but he was also fun-loving and good company. The Snyder family had arrived so early on Saturday that Fidgeon had joked, Have you come for dinner? Cecil Hough was Fidgeons brother-in-law, as was, of course, George Hough, Cecils kid brother. Also at the card party were Mr. and Mrs. Howard Eldridge, neighbors from down the street. Fidgeon recalled the incident three weeks earlier in which Albert claimed that George Hough stole his wallet and seventy-five dollars, and hed thought, It is pretty small business to accuse a party of friends of such a thing. But last nights scene was not as nasty, just a flare-up between two hot-tempered men. Was it possible that George Hough could have been angry enough after Saturday night to kill Albert? Completely and utterly impossible, Fidgeon told the detective. The policemen whod been upstairs in the Snyders master bedroom found McLaughlin and handed him their inventory. Recorded on the list were the front page of the Italian newspaper *LArena*, a gold Bulova mans wristwatch in plain view on the floor, the gold Cross mechanical pencil used to twist the picture wire tight, a fine muskrat coat wrapped in paper and hidden deep in the closet, other unremarkable clothing, and a jewelry box that seemed to have been emptied. But to be thorough, the police had tipped up Mrs. Snyders mattress and found some rings, earrings, and necklaces tucked underneath it. And on the floor near Alberts mattress was discovered an ascot or necktie stickpin bearing the initials J. G. Albert Snyders former fiance was named Jessie Guischar. Shed died of pneumonia before they could marry and his mourning never ended. The stickpin had been a gift to Albert from Jessie but the investigators, significantly, didnt find that out until later and instead guessed the initialed stickpin flew free from the intruders necktie as Albert was being murdered. J. G., they thought, was their first solid clue concerning the killers identity. Seeking the names of friends and associates, a man from the Fourteenth Detective Bureau in Jamaica slid open the middle drawer of a Windsor desk in the sitting room and found Ruths Moroccan leather address book. Written in it were the names, addresses, and phone numbers of fifty-six people, but the detective was interested in only the twenty-eight men. He happened to know two of them, Police Patrolman Edward Pierson, of the 23rd Precinct in the Bronx, and Peter Trumfeller, a friend from the Jamaica precinct. Handing the address book to Deputy Inspector Arthur Carey, head of the homicide squad, the detective said, We can clear one name at least. Theres no way Trumfeller could commit a crime this half-assed. Because of the heat in the house, Carey had taken off his jacket and was rolling up his sleeves. We are looking at real amateurs, arent we? Another burglary detective had already delivered to Carey a cardboard container of canceled checks. When he thumbed through them, he discovered weekly twenty-dollar checks made out to the Prudential Life Insurance Company. That must be a lot of life insurance, Carey said. They probably got special riders on the policy, the burglary detective said. Like what? The detective shrugged. Airplane crashes. Railway accidents. Double-indemnity stuff. The deputy inspector flicked through some more canceled checks and found one for two hundred dollars that was cashed by H. Judd Gray. Judd Grays name was also in the address book. Arthur Carey went up to Lorraines room to wake and interrogate the widow. Waiting for a minute at the doorway, Carey saw the pretty woman was lying on her side but only trying to sleep, for he noticed she was squinting cautiously in his direction from the slightly opened corners of her eyes. Entering the room, he asked, How are you feeling, madam? She seemed to pretend to moan. I feel cried out, she said. Watching him seat himself in a chair, she sat up in Lorraines bed and crossed her forearms over her too evident breasts. Im trying hard to understand why burglars would ransack your house, Deputy Inspector Carey said. Ruth seemed strangely puzzled, as if shed done something wrong. What do you mean? Just that it doesnt look right. How can you tell? She seemed not to recognize she was giving

much away. We see lots of burglaries, Carey said. They aren't done this way. She glanced at Lorraine's night table and found a pack of Wrigley's Juicy Fruit gum. She unwrapped a stick and gauged the inspectors' expression as she slowly and seductively pushed the gum between her pouting lips and into her pretty mouth. His glum face had not changed. She chewed. Are you aware of what happened to your husband? She seemed to shrink a little. She held a hand over her eyes as if crying. He's dead. Well, I've been asking around and nobody told you that, and you never even questioned the medical examiner. Was he shot, was he injured, was he okay? Wouldn't a wife want to know for sure if he was murdered or not? She gazed at him in a pitying way. You have how many detectives in this house? Sixty or so. She sneered. Call it female intuition. Fair enough, Carey said. Let me begin with the first thing this morning. You wake up from a faint and find yourself gagged with a man's handkerchief, your wrists and ankles tied with clothesline. She tentatively said, Yes. And you slithered along the hallway from in front of your room to your daughters, here, opposite the bathroom? She gave him a look like What's the big deal? Why not get help from your husband? Lorraine's room was just down to the right. But your own bedroom door wasn't three feet away. A mother's first worry is for her child. Was it you who locked her door in the night? I forget. Because that was a good idea, wasn't it? That's why the giant Italians couldn't get to your daughter. She just stared at him. Arthur Carey could see she was clamming up and would give him little more about the morning, so he changed the tone and topic. What was your husband's salary at Motor Boating magazine? One hundred fifteen dollars a week. And what was your household budget? I'm not sure what you mean. How much did he give you for groceries, gas and electric, incidentals? Eighty dollars. Each week? She nodded. She seemed proud, even chipper, to be on such familiar terrain. And you carry accident insurance on your husband's life, yes? Of course. How much? A thousand dollars, she said. But what is that, just two and a half months' salary? Was that enough? Well, it was just a thousand. I forgot that we changed that. She ultimately said there were in fact three policies, that the first was for one thousand dollars and that Albert had added another for five thousand and yet another for forty-five thousand dollars. All in November 1925. With which company? Prudential. I'm just curious. I haven't bought much insurance myself. Were there any special provisions to the policies? Like what? I heard of this term double indemnity. Have you heard of that? I hear it means an accidental death, even a homicide like this, pays double the amount on the face of the policy. We had that. All of the policies? On just the last. The forty-five-thousand-dollar policy? She agreed. Wow, Arthur Carey said. I'm doing the arithmetic in my head. You've got the one policy for a thousand and the one for five, and you get double the forty-five, so that's ninety-six thousand dollars? She shrugged. I guess so. Your husband would've had to work fifteen years for that kind of money! But isn't that the point of insurance? To give your family years of security if something horrible and awful and unexpected happens? Couldn't agree with you more, the deputy inspector said. Albert must have cared a lot for you and Lorraine. Albert was the ideal husband and father, she said. Police Commissioner George McLaughlin strolled in and slouched against a wall, just watching Ruth, his hands in his suit pants pockets. We have your address book here, Arthur Carey said, and I'd like to read off some men's names. Why? Humor me, he said, and began with a florist named Abrams. He'd gotten through five more names, including Milton Fidgeon and then Harry Folsom, a hosiery salesman, when he hesitated a little and said, Judd Gray. Both Carey and McLaughlin saw Ruth flinch. And who's he? Carey asked. Sells corselettes, she said. Have you heard of the Bien Jolie brand? I'm not up on those things, Carey said. Well, go on, Ruth said. You know Judd Gray pretty well? No, not really. Reminding Carey, George McLaughlin quietly said, J. G. Wait a minute, Arthur Carey said, and he opened the cardboard container of canceled checks. I'm fairly certain I saw that name Judd Gray before. Oh yeah, here it is. The deputy inspector lifted up a canceled check with a masculine signature on the back. To H. Judd Gray, for two hundred dollars. Isn't that your handwriting, Mrs. Snyder? She examined the check. She nodded. Mr. Gray is a traveling salesman for Bien Jolie. He has a lot of food and hotel expenses and his company, Benjamin and Johnes, was late in repaying him, so I helped out with a temporary loan. And did he repay you? Certainly. Wouldn't two hundred dollars be a lot to loan a man you don't really know? She was flustered. Who said I didn't know him? You did, George McLaughlin said. Half a minute ago. I have no idea where this is going. We do, George McLaughlin said. And we know where you're going, too. The Jamaica precinct house, Arthur Carey said. I can't leave here. You have to. But I'm ill. You look fine to us. She teared up. I've lost a husband, she cried. You ought to be sympathizing with me. You ought to be looking for the killers. We just have some more questions to ask. But at the precinct. And just like that her mood changed. All right, she said, and in fury flung aside Lorraine's blanket as she got out of bed. She then gripped the hem of her green satin nightgown and wriggled it up over her head so that she was stunningly naked in front of

the men. She was blonde there too. She defiantly smiled at their guilty fascination and uneasiness and then strode down the hallway to the room of Alberts murder, where she taunted the shocked policemen at the crime scene by ever so slowly getting into her undergarments and dress. At the Jamaica station house Ruth Snyder was escorted past the glaring group of the Fidgeons, the Eldridges, and the Houghs, including the loutish George with whom Albert had skirmished. She was seated in an interrogation room, where she was grilled for several hours, with each interrogator making wilder suppositions and claiming evidence he didnt yet have. Still, she impressed the commissioner as a woman of great calm. She never requested a lawyer. She requested only food and sleep. And so she was given an Italian restaurants dinner of spaghetti, salad, and garlic bread, and was permitted a half-hour nap on an office sofa as McLaughlin interrogated the guests whod played contract bridge with Albert on Saturday night. Right after that Commissioner George McLaughlin gently shook Ruth awake and introduced her to Detective Lieutenant Michael McDermott, whod be just listening for a while. And then the commissioner asked, Mrs. Snyder, is it true that you often stay out all night? Well, I dont know about often. Who with? With my cousin, Ethel Anderson. Call her and ask. She married? She was. To Edward Pierson. And then, as if it confirmed her veracity and reputation, Ruth commented, Eddies a Bronx patrolman. McLaughlin turned and McDermott took the hint, heading out of the office to telephone the officer and order him to Jamaica. McLaughlin faced Ruth again. Weve been told that last fall you went on a tour of Canada without your husband. She frostily said, Who told you? Women at that card party. Anything wrong with that? I just need to know who went with you. Ruth was tentative. Mr. and Mrs. Kehoe. McLaughlin jotted the name down. You have a telephone number for them? No. How about an address? Somewhere in Brooklyn. She was lying; hed counted at least three tells in her face. McLaughlin laid his pencil down in frustration and walked out of the office, and Ruth just sat there alone, stewing, for half an hour. Around eleven oclock Detective Peter Trumfeller peeked into the room and smiled as he said, Why, hello, Tommy! Trumfeller was a wide and happy man with slicked-back hair and windburnt cheeks. He owned a 1925 Ford T-bucket roadster convertible and shed once cruised with him in it, her scarf and hair fluttering, all the way to West Point and back. Ruth smiled at him in relief. Oh, are you coming to take me home to Lorraine? Detective Trumfeller walked in and held his hand tenderly to her cheek. She turned into the hand and kissed it as tears filled her eyes. She was getting up to go as his other hand roughly forced her down. Like a lover, the fat detective bent over to find her right ear and say in hushed tones, These guys know when youre lying, Tommy. Theyve gone through this hundreds of times and you, youre just a rookie. They know your stories are all baloney because nothing fits together. Youre torturing yourself with lies. Just go ahead and tell the truth and get the elephant off your chest. Ruth was stiff in astonishment and then she lifted the handkerchief in her lap and touched it to each pretty eye. Im so very tired, she said, but only as if shed had a hard day tilling the garden. Wheres the police commissioner? Detective Trumfeller escorted Ruth past the still-glaring card party to the head mans office. It was just past eleven oclock. Cigarette smoke hung from the ceiling. Lieutenant McDermott shook out another Pall Mall but just let it lie on his lip as he watched Ruth walk in. Commissioner McLaughlin swiveled in his creaking oak chair and immediately hung up the black telephone earpiece when he saw her. She smiled. Please accept my apologies for keeping all of you up so late. The police commissioner jerked his head toward a straight-backed chair and Peter Trumfeller scraped it over for Ruth to regally sit on. She softly said, I dont think I can stand any more questioning. McLaughlin nodded toward McDermott and said, Macs been talking to your cousin Ethels estranged husband. Eddie, she said, as if saying it made her happier. Well, Eddie says youve got a boyfriend. The police commissioner twisted around and got a notepad from McDermott, and held the notepad up in front of Ruths face. The name Judd Gray was printed on it. Was this the man who killed your husband? She sighed. Has he confessed? McLaughlin lied and said Judd had indeed confessed; then he invited a stenographer to record their conversation, instructing Ruth so she could make the stenographers job easier. Well begin with your name and intent, he said. My name is Ruth May Snyder, she said, and I want to make a full and truthful statement about the death of my husband, Albert Snyder. The police commissioner coached, And I understand that anything I say may be used against me. She said that. The headlines for the front page of the New York Times had been firmly set by then: GIRL FINDS MOTHER BOUND and Woman Tells of Quarrel at Card Party and of Strangers in House. Page two carried the headline ART EDITOR SLAIN, but that was the last time an account would focus on Albert Snyder. It was Ruth who fascinated. 2011 Ron Hansen *Revue de presse* "Once again, Ron Hansen has proved that he has no peer in the writing of fiction about biographical characters. No one writing today is better at re-creating the past than Hansen, and no one gives better insight into his characters. In this instance, Ron Hansen re-creates the

Roaring Twenties with a sense of immediacy and authenticity that I haven't seen since the novels of F. Scott Fitzgerald and John O'Hara. James M. Cain once said that the greatest of human tragedies usually takes place when people get what they want. That's the story we find in *A WILD SURGE OF GUILTY PASSION*. Could this happen to us, we ask ourselves. The question is a haunting one. Ron Hansen takes us into the heart of America, and the journey never allows us to stop turning the page." James Lee Burke *A Wild Surge of Guilty Passion* is by turns blackly comic, irresistibly seductive, and implacably devastating. As a tour of the Seven Deadly Sins, it's pretty much unsurpassed in recent literature. Jim Shepard, whose most recent story collection is *You Think That's Bad*