



# Five-Star FLEEING



**Maura Stone**

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A WinS Publication

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*Dedicated to three women who loved life:*

My mother, Judith Iris Stone

Lucy Fishman

Patsy Blanks

*“Between dishes and douches, I’m always in hot water.”*

—Rae Warren

## Prelude

1995

Call it woman's intuition, but I somehow felt that this day was gonna be a humdinger. I came in ahead of time, expressly upon Mr. Ganiff's request for some godforsaken reason, and as usual it was his "do as I say, not as I do" situation.

Here I was, stuck in a dimly lit and empty hotel corridor at six forty-eight in the morning because Herr Ganiff had yet to make his matinal appearance. Otherwise, I would've been seated at my desk instead of standing in front of the closed and locked entrance to our offices at six forty-eight in the morning. The place gave me the creeps. I kept seeing fanged monsters in the shadows. While I searched in my handbag for the spare key, something took hold of my right shoulder and attempted to drag me towards the portals of a parallel universe.

I flailed my good arm to thwart off my attacker. At the same time, I dug into the plush carpeting using the four-inch heels of my Manolos as brakes. And, I let out a screech that could wake up the dead, or half... no, make that three-quarters of the guests in the Supreme Superior Hotel. Well, something succeeded because I was released the moment the dogs in the neighborhood howled in response.

I whirled around in a classic Kung Fu pose to confront my attacker, and in the process flung my handbag. It nearly beheaded a diminutive bellhop. Almost instinctively, I followed up with a one-handed chop while emitting a "Hiiiiie-jha!"

"What the hell are you doing?" I screamed, "you almost gave me a stroke!" My right hand stung from the near-lethal blow.

"I almost gave *you* a stroke? Weren't ya tryin' to decapitate me?" he croaked. "Lady, all I did was grab yer shoulder, tryin' to get yer attention—" he broke off to clear his throat. Then he looked down and said under his breath, "To deliver yer newspaper."

I followed his line of vision. There, on the floor, was a crumpled *Daily Post* next to my discarded handbag. Right beside that, the key. I gave him a look that meant "Get it!" He gave it right back at me with a "Make me, bitch." Disgusted, I sighed and bent down. So did he. Clunk! That was the sound of our colliding skulls. I paused for a moment until the whorls of light and darkness subsided. But it didn't stop the little bastard's momentum. He snatched that newspaper right out from under my extended hand, purposely neglecting to pick up my personal effects. The joker then snapped to attention and produced the paper with a flourish. *What a fucking asshole.*

While he was doing whatever he was doing, I scooped up the key along with the handbag. I went to wrest the newspaper from his grasp except he wouldn't let go. When he finally did, my hand rebounded. Once again, I felt a clunk! This time, it was my very own hand holding all that crap smacking against my forehead.

I felt slightly vindicated when he eased his neck back into place from facing starboard. All at once, his arm trembled and his eyes bulged—primary indicators of mini-strokes of a vascular nature.

“Well, you certainly got my attention,” I said.

“Sorry, Miss Linda,” his voice quavered, “ya know it wasn’t intentional.” The bellhop looked sincere. In a matter of seconds he panicked and rasped, “Please don’t tell Ms. Djorak. Please, I really need this job.”

I considered his apology and did a mental tally of the damage: he hurt my forehead though I gave him a pretty good karate chop in return. Everything else was water under the bridge. So, I figured we were even.

“Okay, your secret is safe with me. Go! And don’t come near me, don’t even entertain the idea.”

With restored grace and limited range-of-motion, I unlocked the office door and flicked on the overhead lights. I had scarcely a second to toss the *Daily Post* on the guest chair before the phone rang from across the room. As graceful as a gazelle, I lunged for the receiver and found myself the lucky recipient of a hale and hearty greeting.

“Good morning. Is Mr. Ganiff in? It’s Jerry Orbach.”

Yes, it was unmistakably *the* Jerry Orbach. The beloved actor best known for his role as Lenny the Detective on the television series *Law and Order*. *Oh great*, was my thought, *now a television homicide cop will interrogate me for nearly beheading a bellhop!*

“Good morning, Mr. Orbach. Mr. Ganiff isn’t in yet. This is Linda, his assistant. Is there something I can help you with?” Cradling the phone receiver with my neck, I opened my handbag and retrieved my mostly completed *New York Times* crossword puzzle.

“Oh, a pleasure to meet you, Linda. Yes, I believe so. Mr. Ganiff and I, we met at a social function a while ago and he insisted that I call him should I ever need his services.” While I waited with bated breath to hear what services he needed that compelled him to call a General Manager of a five-star hotel, I pulled out my lipstick, mascara, eye pencil, tweezers and dental floss. I proceeded to place those items in my top drawer.

He sighed. “Well, I have to discuss a situation that is very distressing for me,” he said, “and weighs so heavily on my heart that I had no other recourse but to get up extra early this morning to phone Mr. Ganiff.”

“Oh my! Are you all right?” Concerned, I stopped searching for a pen. This sounded serious.

He sighed one more time, this time deep from his soul. He waited a theatric beat before he responded, “My barber lost his lease.”

*What the fuck? His barber? Was he for real?*

With utmost dignity, I refrained from blurting “Oy vey.” I resumed my search and found my pen sitting right in front of me, on top of my desk. Despite the stinging in my hand, I carefully smoothed the ruffled puzzle and then proceeded to fill in one of the answers to a down clue.

Mr. Orbach continued, “You see, he’s the barber I’ve used for twenty–five years. A very good man. I promised I would help him out and immediately thought of Mr. Ganiff and his kind invitation. Just like that, I figured the Supreme Superior would be a perfect venue for him.”

I was flummoxed. This is *the* Jerry Orbach? And he’s calling a five–star hotel about his barber? Perhaps I was concussed!

“Mr. Orbach, although we’re truly sorry about your barber’s plight, I don’t believe we can accommodate him.” This was the opportune time to recite the standard format response to all requests for installing vendor services in the hotel. I bent forward and read aloud from the little slip of paper taped to the side of my desk. “The Supreme Superior is in fact a small hotel. Every available square inch not used for guests and related guest services is delegated to hotel administration.” For his benefit, I even threw in a little hotel logic at no extra charge. “Sir, our Lobby is so small that we don’t even have a newspaper kiosk.”

Undeterred, Mr. Orbach commenced a dissertation on the virtues of his highly regarded, yet displaced barber. Convinced that I was suffering from an auditory hallucination from my accident, I peered into a portable mirror dangling from the corner of my computer to assess the injury. A definite discoloration and swelling on my forehead. It looked like a facial baby bump that soon would attain mountainous proportions. I also noticed a little blood seepage from the serrated key incision. In the corner of my peripheral vision, I caught sight of Mr. Ganiff, shoes in hand, tiptoeing by. He stopped momentarily to snatch the *Daily Post* off my chair. Then he whisked into his office, making sure to slam the door shut behind him.

That slam set off all my internal alarms. Pain took hold of me. I could no longer concentrate. I couldn’t even focus on my puzzle. Even more so, I was worried that soon my brains would seep out of my ears. Insofar as the conversation with Mr. Orbach, I no longer had any idea what he was saying. But if it were so, if he truly wanted to put a barber in our hotel, I’d have no other choice...

I girded my loins. Kissed my lucky charm. Invoked the munificence of the gods. I asked him point–blank, “Have you ever been here?”

“I’m in the Lobby as we speak,” he said.

“Oh, you are!” *He’s good. He got me.* “Okay, Mr. Orbach. Look around, please. Do you see the grand piano in the middle of the Lounge?”

“Yes, Linda, I do.”

“Good, sir. Because that’s probably the last available space we have.” I waited a theatric beat. “But... Sor–ry. Wayne Newton beat you to the punch! Next week



Criminals, liars and thieves, oh my! And to think not even a year ago, Linda would never have associated those words with the 5-Star New York City hotel, the Supreme Superior.

Having fled from dubious circumstances in her prior career, Linda Lane is now the acting Resident Manager of the esteemed Supreme Superior Hotel, all the rage of the entertainment, business and hospitality industries. Surrounded by celebrities, upscale guests and strangely conflicted hotel colleagues, Linda finds that the most daunting aspect of her job is her association with her celebrated boss, the General Manager. The longer she works for him, the more she realizes that perhaps her flight from her past was not precisely an escape from the inevitable.

'Five-Star FLEECING' is an adult-themed comedy concerning corporate theft through the eyes of Linda Lane, a naïve yet ambitious New Yorker. Almost Feydeau-esque in nature, 'Five-Star FLEECING' mixes it all up — distortions in time and space, hotel guests, celebrities, paparazzis, duplicity, crazed employees, karma— and spins almost out of control. Anyone who enjoys reading gossip rags, traveling, entertaining or even wants a brief respite will find Five-Star FLEECING a great adventure.

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