



Dishonorable Intentions (A Stone Barrington Novel)

By Stuart Woods

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Stone Barrington gains an adversary that he can't seem to shake in this electrifying adventure from the #1 *New York Times*–bestselling author.

Stone Barrington's latest lady friend is full of surprises, both good and ill. A sensual woman with unexpected desires, Stone finds her revelations in the boudoir extremely agreeable. But on the other hand, she also has some unfinished business with a temperamental man who believes Stone is an intolerable obstacle in the way of his goals.

In a cat-and-mouse game that trails from sun-drenched Bel-Air to a peaceful European estate and gorgeous Santa Fe, Stone and his friend remain just one step ahead of their opponent. But their pursuer is not a man who can stand to be thwarted, and tensions are mounting...and may soon reach the boiling point.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Stuart Woods is the author of sixty novels. He is a native of Georgia and began his writing career in the advertising industry. *Chiefs*, his debut in 1981, won the Edgar Award. An avid sailor and pilot, Woods lives in Florida, Maine, and New York.

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1

Stone Barrington spotted the Santa Fe airport ten miles out. “Albuquerque Center, November One, Two, Three, Tango Foxtrot has the airport in sight.”

“N123TF, contact the tower on 119.5. Good day to you.”

“Good day.” He tuned into the channel. “Santa Fe tower, N123TF nine miles to the north at ten thousand. Request straight in for runway two zero.”

“N123TF, I have you in sight. Cleared for the visual to two zero.”

“Tango Fox, cleared for the visual.” Stone lined up on the runway, reduced power, put in his first notch of flaps, and dialed in eight thousand feet. The autopilot began the descent. Five miles out, he dropped the landing gear, slowing the airplane further, then put in 35 degrees of flaps and let the airplane slow to approach speed.

At the sound of the gear lowering, Bob, Stone’s trusty yellow Labrador retriever, left his bed in the passenger compartment, jumped up on a seat, and looked out the window.

At five hundred feet above ground level, Stone slowed to reference speed of 107 knots, crossed the runway threshold, and settled smoothly onto the tarmac. As he put in the final notch of flaps to dump lift and began to brake, he spotted the Aston Martin parked on the ramp outside Landmark Aviation and the tall blond woman in sweater and slacks leaning against it.

He turned off the runway, stopped, and ran his afterlanding checklist, then called the tower and was cleared to taxi to the ramp. A lineman waved him in next to the Aston Martin, then chocked the nose wheel. Stone pulled the throttles to the shutdown position and waited for the engines to spool down before turning off the main switch, which shut down the instrument panel. He struggled out of his seat, opened the cabin door, grabbed his briefcase, kicked down the folding stairs, and allowed Bob to deplane first.

Gala Wilde met them at the bottom of the steps, planted an enthusiastic kiss on Stone's lips, and scratched Bob's back. "Welcome back," she said. "We've got dinner at seven at the Eagles' house." Gala was the sister of Mrs. Ed Eagle, Susannah Wilde.

Stone retrieved his overnight bag from the forward luggage compartment and tossed it into the rear of the Aston Martin along with his briefcase, which used nearly all of the available luggage space, then got into the passenger seat and let Bob crowd in beside him. "I'm ready for a drink," he said.

"Sadly, I don't keep the stuff in the car, so you'll have to wait another twenty minutes."

"I'll try, but I may get the shakes. Flying always makes me thirsty."

She started the engine, which emitted a pleasing, guttural noise, then waited for the gate to open. "Good flight?"

"Boring flight—the best kind. I read the Times and did the crossword."

"Good crossword?"

"Saturdays are always a bitch. They're the most fun."

"Thank you, I think."

Stone laughed. "That wasn't a personal reference."

Twenty minutes later they pulled into the driveway of her house in the village of Tesuque, on the northern rim of Santa Fe. He grabbed his luggage and followed her to the master suite, while Bob paused to inspect the grass, then followed. Stone dumped his bags in the master bedroom and followed her into the kitchen sitting room, where a leather-covered rolling bar held a nest of bottles. Bob settled for Tesuque well water.

“Knob Creek?”

“Of course.”

“Have you tried their rye?”

“Didn’t know there was one.”

“There is. Shall I pour you one?”

“Go ahead, I’ll be brave.”

She handed him a glass and poured herself one. They both sipped.

“That’s really good,” Stone said. “I haven’t drunk a lot of rye.”

“I hadn’t either, until I discovered it at a bourbon bar at a restaurant in town.” She sank down beside him on the sofa. A cheery fire of piñon wood crackled in the fireplace.

“A bourbon bar? Never seen one of those, but it sounds like a good idea. What’s happening with your screenplay?”

“The plan is for Ben Bacchetti to sign his first production order on Monday morning, and it’s my screenplay.”

“He’ll be signing it as head of production,” Stone said. “Leo Goldman isn’t quite ready to relinquish his title as CEO. He’s unwell, though, so it might only be a matter of months before he moves over.”

“How does Peter feel about losing his production partner?”

“He’s not losing him, Ben will still produce their pictures personally, at least until he becomes CEO.”

“He’ll be a busy fellow.”

“He seems to like it that way. Peter says Ben always got bored while they were waiting for production approval. That won’t be a problem anymore. By the way, I’m joining the Centurion board on Monday morning.”

“What do you know about motion pictures?”

“Well, I’ve seen a lot of them. That seems to be the only qualification of half the movie executives in L.A.”

“You’re right about that.”

“Of course, Peter’s trust and I, combined, are the largest stockholders of the company.”

“I suppose he inherited his stock from Vance Calder.” Calder was the late movie star who had been Peter’s stepfather. His mother, Arrington, had married Calder while pregnant with Stone’s son.

“He did.”

“How about you?”

“I’ve been buying the stock for years from people who were required to divest on retirement. It adds up over time.”

“What are the duties of a director of the company?”

“Four board meetings a year, plus an occasional special meeting, when circumstances require.”

“And for that you get what?”

“Money and the use of the corporate jet at half the company’s cost.”

“But you have your own jet.”

“True, but it’s nice to have access to a brand-new Gulfstream 650 when traveling long distances, and they might even let me fly right seat sometimes. I’m getting qualified in it.”

“And how long will that take?”

“A month or more, but it will be fun, as well as hard work. I’ve already done three weeks of it. They’ll let me finish up when I can find the time.”

“I get the impression that your time is pretty much your own,” she said.

“It’s surprising how much law you can practice with an iPhone and a computer. I’ve even attended board meetings on Skype, while at my house in England.”

“I’m looking forward to seeing that house.”

“That can be arranged.”

“Well, it’s not as though the production company is glad to see me after they’ve started shooting. They regard the writer as excess baggage once the production order is signed.”

“Will you start anew one soon?”

“I’m always working, and I have a good idea for a new one.”

“Think you can write in England?”

“I don’t see why not.” She looked at her watch. “We’ve got an hour before dinner. Do you think we could find something to do until then?”

“My intentions are thoroughly dishonorable,” he said, kissing her.

“Sofa or bed?”

“It’s a big sofa.”

Buttons, snaps, and garments came undone.

2

Stone was asleep, curled up behind Gala, when a noise woke him. It wasn’t much of a noise, so he began drifting off again, then there was a loud crash. Bob was snoring away, ignoring his role in security management.

Gala woke, too. “What was that?”

“I don’t know. Do you have a gun in the house?”

“Bedside table, top drawer. There’s one in the chamber.”

There was another noise, loud enough to waken even Bob. He began growling, but he didn’t move.

Stone got up and trotted noiselessly across the kitchen and into the master suite. He found the gun, a Colt Government .380; he opened the slide slightly to be sure there was a round chambered. The noise came again. He tiptoed to the door opening onto a patio and silently opened it, stepping outside in his bare feet.

A scraping noise came from his left, sounding like somebody trying to get in through a window or door. The evening desert chill hit him, and he realized he was naked. He crept to the corner of the house and looked around it, just as an outdoor security light came on. The intruder blinked in the harsh light, then stared at Stone.

Stone found himself staring back at a large black bear, no more than ten feet from where he stood. The bear uttered a low, threatening noise. Stone screamed wordlessly at him, while jumping up and down and waving his arms. The bear seemed to reevaluate his threat, while watching Stone with curiosity.

“Okay,” Stone said to the bear, “I can’t shout any louder than that. How about this?” He pointed the gun and pulled the trigger twice, hitting the tree he had been aiming at.

The bear thought better of things, spun around, and hurried off into the darkness.

“Well done,” a voice behind him said.

Startled, Stone spun around. Gala stood in the door, as naked as he. Bob peeked out from behind her. “Did you invite that guy over for drinks?”

Gala laughed. “They sometimes come down the mountain and into the village. When I had the new roof put on, the roofers found bear scat up there.”

Stone suddenly realized he was cold and stepped inside, shivering.

“Dinner is in twenty minutes,” Gala said. “We’d better get dressed.”

They arrived at the residence of Ed and Susannah Eagle fashionably late.

“I’m sorry we were late,” Stone said, “but we had an intruder.”

“An intruder?” Ed asked.

“Biggest black bear you ever saw.”

“Did he get into the house?”

“No, I fired a couple of shots into a tree, and he thought better of it.”

Ed handed them both a Knob Creek on the rocks. “Susannah is finishing dinner. Use this as a stopgap.” He waved them to a living room sofa. “You don’t ever want one of those things to get into the house, Gala, they can destroy it in minutes.”

“I’ll keep that in mind, Ed.”

“Didn’t you bring Bob?”

“I thought he needed his rest. I think the bear scared him to death.”

“Stone, can we hitch a ride to L.A. with you tomorrow? My airplane blew a couple of current limiters, and we had to order replacements from Wichita.”

“Of course.”

“Anyway, I’ve wanted a chance to fly your airplane.”

“You’ll love it. My cockpit is identical to your M2’s, except for a single cockpit switch.”

Susannah came into the room and greeted them both with hugs and kisses. “Dinner will be ready in half an hour,” she said, accepting a drink from her husband. “We’re looking forward to your party Monday night, Stone.”

Stone was throwing a large party at his house at the Arrington for Ben Bacchetti. “It’s going to be mostly studio people,” he said.

“Why aren’t Dino and Viv with you?”

“Dino had a thing he couldn’t avoid. They’re flying in commercial tomorrow.”

“Will Mary Ann be there, too?”

Mary Ann Bianci was Dino’s ex-wife and Ben’s mother.

“Oh, sure.”

“That should be exciting.”

“Mary Ann has been behaving herself, since her father died. The experience seems to have mellowed her.”

“I’m so glad to hear it. I remember when she could be a horrible bitch.”

“If she gets started, we’ll throw a bag over her and push her into the pool.”

“That, I’d like to see. Who from the studio is coming?” Susannah asked.

“I left that to Ben and Peter. They tell me we’ll be thirty for dinner. We’ll do a buffet around the pool.”

“Will the President and the President be there?”

“The Lees will be in town to meet with the Japanese prime minister. They’ll be occupying the presidential cottage, but I don’t expect to see them during their visit.”

“How’s their baby doing?”

“I’ve met him only once, and he seems to be behaving like a baby should. He’s cheerful enough.”

Dinner was beef and plenty of it, washed down with a couple of bottles of the Caymus Special Selection Cabernet. It was nearly midnight when the party broke up, and Stone and Gala returned to her house.

“Shall I inspect for bears?” Stone asked as they got out of the car.

“Not without the gun,” Gala replied. “It’s back in the bedside drawer.”

She let them into the house. Stone collected the gun and walked back onto the patio off the master suite. The outside lights automatically sensed his presence and came on. He moved carefully around the rear exterior of the house. Something rustled in the bushes, but nothing big enough for a bear; however, he managed to step in something that was too much for a dog or a coyote. He had to get paper towels from the kitchen to clean it off his shoe.

Gala was looking out of sorts when he returned. He cleared the weapon and returned it to its drawer. “I’ll clean the gun for you tomorrow.” He looked at her closely. “Something the matter?”

“A phone message from my ex-husband,” Gala said wearily. “He wants to see me when we’re in L.A.”

“You don’t have to see him.”

“If I don’t, he’ll just keep calling. I’ll have a drink with him and get it over with.”

“Whatever you say.”

“I just can’t imagine what he could want. He’s gotten everything the settlement entitled him to. The last thing he demanded was a case of old wine that he forgot to include.”

“I hope you drank it.”

“No, I shipped it to him.”

“But he keeps asking for things?”

“That’s his pattern.”

“You’ll have to call an end to that. I’ll help, if I can. You can introduce me as your new attorney.”

“That’s a thought. Let’s see how it goes in L.A.”

They made love again and were soon asleep. Why did beautiful women always seem to have grumpy ex-husbands? he wondered as he drifted off.

3

Stone was served a sumptuous breakfast in bed, while watching his favorite Sunday-morning shows, which Gala had TiVo’ed for him. To his surprise, CBS News Sunday Morning had a feature on Boris Tirov, Gala’s ex-husband.

“I heard about this a couple of weeks ago,” Gala said, “but I forgot about it. We may as well watch it.”

In an interview conducted next to his large pool overlooking Malibu Beach, Tirov, a handsome, fit-looking fellow of around fifty, waxed eloquent about his success in the film business, commenting graciously on some of the people he’d worked with.

“I understand you’re leaving Sony and taking your production company to Centurion,” the interviewer said.

“I’m afraid I can’t comment about that,” Tirov replied.

“Would such an announcement come as a surprise to Sony?” he was asked.

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