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Title/Author: Demise in Denim/Duffy Brown

[FRONT COVER:]

Demise in Denim

A Consignment Shop Mystery

Duffy Brown

National Bestselling Author of *Pearls and Poison*

“My favorite go-to cozy mystery series.”

—Dreamworld Book Reviews

[SPINE:]

Demise in Denim

A Consignment Shop Mystery

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[BACK COVER:]

Praise for the Consignment Shop Mysteries

It's springtime in Savannah, Georgia. The azaleas and magnolias are in bloom—and Walker Boone is on the run...

When Reagan Summerside turned the first floor of her old Victorian home into a consignment shop, she never imagined she'd be harboring a fugitive in her attic. But after a dead man is found in a bathtub and local lawyer Walker Boone is accused of doing the dirty deed, she suddenly has a new houseguest.

Having the lawyer who took her to the cleaners in her divorce settlement—and who has been getting under her skin ever since—in close proximity is enough to drive Reagan to distraction. For the sake of her sanity—and Walker's freedom—they need to put their heads together to find out who is trying to get the lawyer out of the picture...

“Outrageous and hilarious.” —Kings River Life Magazine

“Brown splashes Southern charm and coziness throughout.”

—Socrates' Book Review

PAGE NUMBERS: TI & synopsis

duffybrown.com
penguin.com

[COVER 3:]

[Author photo]

Duffy Brown is the author of the Consignment Shop Mystery series, including *Iced Chiffon*, *Killer in Crinolines*, and *Pearls and Poison*. She loves anything with a mystery. While other girls dreamed of dating Brad Pitt, Duffy longed to take Sherlock Holmes to the prom. She has two cats, Spooky and Dr. Watson, and works at a consignment shop when she's not busy conjuring up whodunit stories. Visit duffybrown.com.

[FRONT SALES – page 1 of 3]

**Praise for
*Pearls and Poison***

“Readers are sure to be immersed in this outrageously entertaining and hilarious mystery. This third in the series continues to highlight sharp dialogue, eccentric characters, and expand on the mystery that is Walker Boone.”—Kings River Life Magazine

“The diverse cast of characters...are hilarious and completely endearing. Given the book’s (very) Southern setting, Brown manages to keep things exciting and colorful enough to please all cozy mystery lovers—and not just those who can relate to living in the South. The mystery aside (which is incredibly enjoyable and not easily predictable), the mounting tension between Reagan and Walker make reading this charming mystery novel worthwhile...Brown’s Consignment Shop series is now my favorite go-to cozy mystery series.” —Dreamworld Book Reviews

“What a fun ride this series is! It will keep you laughing and cheering for Reagan and her cohorts through the entire book. Duffy Brown keeps her readers on their toes with so many twists and turns, your head will spin. The author has a true flair for writing snappy dialogue and bringing the reader right into her story...Duffy Brown splashes Southern charm and coziness throughout the entire book. Nobody does it better than she does.”
—Socrates’ Book Review

Killer in Crinolines

“Brown deftly spins the tale of Reagan's many misadventures while sleuthing, fills her story with Southern eccentrics and offers up a magnolia-laced munificence of Savannah color.” —*Richmond Times-Dispatch*

“A fast-paced cozy with lots of twists and turns. Brown has a knack for writing dialogue and readers will find themselves so engrossed in the story, it's hard to concentrate on anything else.” —Debbie’s Book Bag

Continued...

[FRONT SALES – page 2 of 3]

“Great characters, funny dialogue, twists and turns and a little romance. What more could you want in a cozy mystery? If Agatha Christie lived in Savannah, she would have written this novel. Charming, clever, and sometimes creepy, a really good read.” —Sweet Mystery Books

“So, click martini glasses or frosty bottles or iced-tea cups, and swig back the high times as Reagan and her Auntie TCB in one of the most fun and Southern-flavorful mystery series on the market.” —Book Reviews by David Marshall James

“Southern coziness at its finest! A most enjoyable read—mystery fans will love this one. It's the kind of book that makes a bad day good!” —Socrates’ Book Reviews

“If you have read *Iced Chiffon*, then you'll absolutely LOVE *Killer in Crinolines*. In fact, if you weren't hooked on the series after reading *Iced Chiffon*, you bet your derriere you'll be hooked after reading this one. Its compelling mystery and engaging plot will have you staying up countless hours into the night...If you're a fan of Southern mysteries and just cozy mysteries in general, I HIGHLY recommend checking out this new series by Duffy Brown! You won't regret it, I promise.” —Dreamworld Book Reviews

Iced Chiffon

“A Southern comfort cozy with Yankee tension...A treat. Not to be missed.”—Annette Blair, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Tulle Death Do Us Part*

“An amazing mystery debut...Riveting.”—Mary Kennedy, author of the Talk Radio Mysteries

“A hilarious romp through a consignment shop where customers may end up with more than they bargained for.”—Janet Bolin, author of the Threadville Mysteries

“A delightful world filled with charm and humor.”—*New York Journal of Books*

[FRONT SALES – page 3 of 3]

“This amusing, thoroughly entertaining mystery...has perfect accomplices, plenty of suspects and humorous situations.”—RT Book Reviews

“Besides a fabulous look at Savannah, especially the haunts of high society, Duffy Brown provides a lighthearted jocular amateur sleuth.”—Gumshoe Reviews

“Delightful...If I could give it six stars, I would.”—Examiner.com

“A pleasant beginning to a new series...A light tone, a quick pace, [and] good old Southern hospitality...all come together for a charming read.”—The Mystery Reader

“A strong story, fantastic, well-developed characters and a great mystery... *Iced Chiffon* was a stellar read and I can't wait to see where Duffy Brown takes these characters next.”
—Cozy Mystery Book Reviews

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Chapter One

The convertible top was down, a crescent moon hung low over the marshlands, and the night sky was filled with a bazillion stars as I drove Walker Boone's precious red '57 Chevy toward Tybee Post. It was a perfect spring night except that my palms were sweating, my heart was rocketing around in my chest, I shook so bad it was hard to keep the car on the road, and there were one, two, make that four police cars on my bumper, their red and blue lights flashing in my rearview mirror.

Of course I wouldn't be in this fix if Conway Adkins hadn't been found dead in his very own bathtub and Boone hadn't gotten himself accused of the murder. Taking Boone's Chevy and heading off in one direction to get the cops off his tail while he took my new cute-as-a-button pink scooter and escaped in the other direction seemed like a really good idea . . . till now.

Figuring I'd pushed the *surely you can't be after little ol' me* routine as far as I could, I pulled to the side of the road, careful not to drown Boone's car in the swamp and wind up gator food. As the string of cruisers lined up behind me, illuminating the dark like fireworks on the Fourth of July, and traffic slowed to snap iPhone pics that would make me an instant Savannah celebrity of the wrong kind, the gator-food option looked pretty darn good.

"Get out with your hands raised" blared from the cop's bullhorn. Teeth chattering and knees knocking, I finally wrenched the car door open and stood, arms up. Immediately they were handcuffed behind me. Okay, I'd expected this to happen, but the real deal was downright terrifying. *Breathe*, I ordered myself. *Think calm and cool and try not to babble like you always do when scared spitless.*

"You're not Boone," a cop growled as he spun me around. "Where is he?"

A loaded question if ever there was one. I gave Officer Deckard—least that was what his name tag said—the innocent-and-clueless arched-eyebrow expression. "Why now, I have no idea where Walker Boone is and can we make this quick, I got to get home to let my dog out to pee."

Deckard's lips thinned, the little capillaries in his eyes ready to pop. He yanked the collar of Boone's much-too-large-on-me leather jacket and whipped the Atlanta Braves ball cap off my head and tossed it into the cattails. "You know where he is. You wanted us to think you're Walker Boone."

"Me? I run the Prissy Fox consignment shop in Savannah." Was that squeaky voice really mine?

"And I've heard about you. You're a total pain in the ass, always sticking your nose in where it doesn't belong."

"There is that."

Deckard picked me up by the collar, my frightened gaze now level with his really-pissed-off one. "We both know Boone's wanted for murdering Conway Adkins. We have Boone's gun, we know he did the deed, and here you are helping him get away by driving his car and wearing his jacket and hat, and leading us on a wild-goose chase."

"Would I do that?"

That got me the *how'd you like to rot in jail for the rest of your natural life* cop glare. "If you're not helping him, how'd you get the keys to his car?"

“They were in the ignition.”

“You stole his car?”

“He took Princess.”

“Kidnapping?”

“A scooter. It’s new and pink and the helmet smells like cotton candy on the inside, I had to pay extra for that, and that’s the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but—” That got me tossed in the back of a cruiser. I think the cotton-candy part pushed Decker over the edge, and twenty minutes later I was sitting across from Detective Aldeen Ross in the Dumpster-green police interrogation room back in Savannah. This night was not improving.

I knew enough not to touch under the table, avoid anything wet on top of the table, and step around slick spots on the floor. The reason I possessed this valuable information was that this was not my first time in the police interrogation room on Habersham Street or my first time meeting up with Ross. Fact is, Aldeen Ross and I were sort of buds depending on which side of the law I happened to be standing on at the moment and whether one of us was willing to share a six-pack of sprinkle doughnuts from Cakery Bakery.

“Boone can’t hide forever, you know,” Ross said to me in a flat matter-of-fact voice even though the look in her eyes suggested that Boone probably had enough street smarts to hide forever if he wanted to.

“He didn’t kill Conway,” I said. “He isn’t a bullet-between-the-eyes kind of guy. He’s an attorney, upholds the law, I doubt if he cheats on his taxes, and there’s the little fact that Conway was Boone’s daddy. He’s not about to kill his own father, for Pete’s sake, even if the piece of crud deserved it.”

Ross sat back in the chair, her navy poly jacket pulled tight across her pastry-enhanced girth. “The way we see it,” she said, “is that Conway the elder walked out on Walker when he was a baby, married money, had nothing to do with Walker all his life even when he was living on the streets, and never claimed him as his own. Conway the elder had nightmares of burning in hell for all eternity for his sins so he told Walker who he was, left him the Old Harbor Inn in his will to make up for being a first-class ass, and then Walker did Conway in before he could change the will back. Plus Walker had thirty-four years of ticked-off under his belt to egg him on. Sounds like motive for murder to me.”

“Except you and I both know that Boone doesn’t egg, and if he did Conway in no one would ever find the gun or the body, and what about everybody else who hated Conway? They aren’t going to be erecting statues in his honor anytime soon around here.”

Ross stood and leaned across the table toward me, her voice low and her brown eyes intense. She put her hand over the little microphone that recorded the conversations in this room. “Keep in mind Boone’s got his share of enemies, and they’re tickled pink he’s on the run, and they’ll be even happier once he’s rotting behind bars. Somebody framed him, and if they think you’re out to rectify the situation you’ll be the next one in their crosshairs. The best way to find out what’s what is to act like you hate the guy, and that’s going to be real tough with that dopey look on your face when you mention his name.”

“He kissed me.”

“Forget the kiss.”

“It curled my toes.” I rolled my eyes up. “Singed my brows.”

Ross pointed a stiff finger at the door. “A cold shower and a bad memory is your only hope. Now get yourself out of here; I’m late for my midnight doughnut and if you find out where Boone is you better tell me.”

“You bet.”

“You’re lying.

“Only when necessary.” I hurried out the door before Ross changed her mind about setting me free. Personally I didn’t think there was enough cold water in the Arctic to kill the aftereffects of a Walker Boone kiss, but unless I wanted to go the lobotomy route it was worth a shot.

It was late and I was tired to the bone as I stepped out into the police parking lot. I hated that Boone was on the lam, I really did, but the upside was it gave me some time to think about what that kiss meant. Another upside was that I had myself a car, a really sweet car. No one had reported the Chevy stolen, so the police gave me back the keys and here it was parked right in front of me. It was all nice and red and shiny as if waiting for me to take it home and tuck it into my garage, which had been carless since I’d divorced Hollis the Horrible, who drove off with the Lexus I paid for.

I lovingly stroked the ragtop, unlocked it, and sat behind the wheel, inhaling the scent of fine leather and a hint of residual exhaust that graced sublime vintage cars. I cranked the engine over, listening to the low rumble, feeling the vibrations up my spine and across my neck. I eased the gear into drive, inching forward so as not to hit the cars or either side or nick the Chevy.

Then I put the car in reverse and put the Chevy back to where I found it. That one of the Chevy’s fins took out the front light of an old tan pickup parked next to me was testimony to just how little I knew about being the captain of a vintage boat. I killed the engine, got out of the car, and left my contact info on the truck.

Here’s the thing: If I drove out of the police station in Boone’s car, the reporters hanging around would see it and follow me and ask a bunch of questions about Boone that I didn’t want to answer. They’d probably hunt me down later, but if I snuck out of here now that would give me time to figure out what to say. Wouldn’t you know it, after two years of schlepping myself on and off buses and hoofing it from one end of this city to the other, I finally get a car to tool around in and I couldn’t even use it.

A cruiser pulled into the lot and parked by the rear entrance to the police station. Two uniforms wrestled one of Savannah’s drunk and disorderlies from the backseat, and I used the distraction to slip out of view of the reporters, slink across Hall Street, and fade into the shadows. I headed down Habersham, flanked on each side by restaurants and bars closed for the night. It was a darn shame they weren’t open, as a Reuben from the Firefly would taste really terrific right now.

I cut across Troup Square^[CE3], one of the twenty-three parks in Savannah. This one had a doggie fountain where Bruce Willis, my four-legged BFF, loved to socialize with the other canines and—Holy cow! BW! He hadn’t had a potty break in hours. I could picture him howling by the door with his back legs crossed. I took off in a run, cut through Whitfield Square with moonlight filtering through the big oaks draped in Spanish moss, and darted around the gazebo that every bride in the city used as a backdrop for wedding pics.

Hanging a left onto Gwinnett, I caught sight of the light in the front display window of the Prissy

Fox, my consignment shop on the ground floor of my less-than-pristine Victorian. Someone was sitting on the decomposing front porch steps. Either it was a green alien with round things poking out of its head or it was my Auntie KiKi dolled up in night rollers and face cream.

“Lord have mercy,” she said in a stage whisper so as not to disturb the residential quiet around us. “I thought Ross done locked you up and swallowed the key.” Auntie KiKi hiccupped and saluted my presence with her martini.

KiKi was my only auntie, my next-door neighbor, and more often than not my partner in crime solving. She was also the local dance instructor for such things as cotillions, weddings, anniversaries, and coming-out parties of any variety. KiKi was a nondiscriminatory^[CE4] kind of dance teacher.

“What are you doing up at his hour? Uncle Putter’s got to be wondering where the heck you are.”

KiKi patted BW, who was sprawled out beside her and snoring like a hibernating bear. “Poor thing was cutting up such a ruckus over here with his barking and whining I had to see what the problem was. He peed like a racehorse once I got him out by the bushes. Putter’s asleep with his headphones and *Dreaming Your Way to Long Drives and Short Putts* blaring into his brain.”

“Martinis?” I looked from KiKi’s glass to the silver shaker. “It’s after two.” I wedged myself between KiKi and BW, and KiKi handed me a glass. “And three olives?”

“Honey, from what I’ve seen it’s a three-olive night.” KiKi pulled her iPhone from the pocket of her yellow terry robe that matched her yellow terry slippers. She tapped on the little blue birdie app and pulled up a video with me surrounded by the police and flashing lights, my hands behind my back and getting hauled off toward a cruiser.

KiKi slid the phone back into her pocket. “You need to be keeping yourself up if you’re going to be starring in social media like this. Your mamma is a judge, after all, and the Summersides got a family reputation to protect.” She took a long drink. “So, I’m thinking this has something to do with Conway deader than a mackerel in his own bathtub with a bullet between his beady little eyes and Walker getting the blame. Twitter knows all.”

This time I took a sip of martini, the cool alcohol sliding down my throat and taking the edge off a hair-raising night. “Here’s what’s going on,” I said to catch KiKi up on what happened. “The police found Walker’s .38 revolver and it was the same gun used to do in Conway Adkins, who we now know is Boone’s daddy. Best I can tell, Detective Ross doesn’t think Walker killed Conway because earlier tonight she called Mamma to let her know what was going on and Mamma called me. Judge Gloria Summerside couldn’t very well get involved in this herself now could she so contacting Boone got passed on to me.. Anyway, I showed up on Boone’s doorstep to tell him the cops were on their way to arrest him and we came up with the *I take his car and he takes my scooter* plan to give him time to get away.”

“Did he kiss you?”

“How’d you know?”

“You say his name and get a dopey look. Got any idea who did in Conway?”

Here’s the thing with Auntie KiKi . . . she was family. Getting her involved in dangerous situations was something I really tried to avoid, but I seldom succeeded. Still, I had to try. “Uncle Putter’s not going to be happy if you get mixed up in this. It’s bound to be risky. He’ll have a hissy.”

KiKi took a sip of martini and gave me her devil smile. I knew I was going to lose the argument before she opened her mouth. “This is Walker Boone we’re talking about. He caught me when I fell off that tree fire escape some months back, your own mamma put him through law school, and he showed Putter how to birdie the sixth hole out at Sweet Marsh Country Club[CE5], for which my dear husband will be forever grateful. I wouldn’t be one bit surprised if Walker Boone was hiding under our bed this very minute with Putter’s blessing.”

“Uncle Putter would harbor a fugitive?”

“In the name of golf, all things are possible.” KiKi winked and poured a refill martini from the shaker. “While keeping BW company and waiting for you to get home, I’ve been making a list of who could have done in Conway. I didn’t know the man all that well, personally, but I got it firsthand that he was into doing the horizontal hula with the marrieds. Maybe a jealous husband did the deed. Then again, there was no love lost between Conway and his other son, Tucker. Tucker got raised in the big house with all the money and private school and the like, but maybe Tucker had enough of Daddy Dear driving him crazy for thirty-something years and pulled the trigger. Best I can tell from the kudzu vine is that Tucker and Conway never got along, and lately things had gotten even worse.”

“Murder’s a lot of not getting along.”

Something crashed inside the house, shattering the night quiet. I jumped, KiKi sloshed her martini, and BW didn’t flinch a muscle. KiKi’s eyes rounded, the white circles against the green facial goop giving the appearance of a hard-boiled egg in a salad. Sensible women would scream, call 911, grab the martinis and dog, and run like the dickens. Auntie KiKi and I were many things, but I don’t remember *sensible* being on the list.

I set my glass beside KiKi’s and grabbed Old Yeller, my indestructible yellow pleather purse that had saved my behind on more than one occasion. KiKi snapped up the silver cocktail shaker for either whacking or drinking; with Auntie KiKi it was hard to tell which. We stepped over the sweetest pet but worst watchdog on the planet and opened the door to the entrance hall and once-upon-a-time dining room just beyond.

Moonlight spilled in through the rear windows, silhouetting the racks of dresses to the left; blouses, pants, and jackets to the right; and the table in the center with jewelry and evening purses. I flipped on the switch for the chandelier.

“Who’s there?” I called out.

Footsteps skittered across the floor over our heads. I had either a big rodent problem or a break-in. Beady eyes? Whiskers? Skinny tail? Yikes! Truth be told, I was hoping for the break-in. I tore up the steps, with KiKi right behind me. We turned the corner at the top and faced a big guy with alcohol-infused breath and wild-looking bloodshot eyes that I could make out even in the dark. I had a break-in *and* a rodent problem. The guy took a swing at me and missed. KiKi threw the rest of the martini in his face and I added an Old Yeller upercut to his jaw.

“I give up! I give up!” The guy stumbled back against the wall and slithered down to the floor as I switched on the hall lights.

“Tucker Adkins?” KiKi said as the guy swiped at his eyes. “What in the world are you doing in this here house uninvited? You should be home taking care of your family and your daddy’s funeral arrangements.”

“What I’m doing is taking care of my daddy’s killer.” Tucker staggered to his feet. “I’m here looking for Walker Boone. Why else would somebody like me be in a secondhand clothing store?”

I hadn’t seen Conway Adkins very often, but from what I remembered Tucker had his daddy’s rounded chubby face and receding hairline. Tucker pointed in my direction. “You were driving Boone’s car; you were wearing his jacket and helping him get away. I saw the whole thing on Twitter. I figured the cops would have you locked up for doing such a thing, and since you and Boone are obviously an item he’d be in your house hiding out. I saw green-curler girl here out on the porch with the mangy mutt so I got in through the back; it was a piece of cake. You really need a better hiding place for your key.”

“You’re here looking for Boone?” I asked.

“He killed my father, my own daddy, and he needs to pay for it and I’m going to find him.”

Drat! This was just what Ross said would happen. Because I was driving Boone’s car, everyone would think I was helping him escape the long arm of the law no matter what. On the other hand, if it seemed like Boone and I were enemies and I made up some spiel as to why I didn’t like him, others who had it in for Boone might confide in me and I could find out who had it in for him. Heck, it was worth a try.

“Are you kidding? Boone means nothing to me,” I blurted. “Fact is, we’re enemies. Yeah, big-time enemies.” I parked my hands on my hips and went for the ticked-off wounded-victim look. “Boone took me to the cleaners in my divorce a couple years ago, and this is my chance to see him knocked down a peg or two. That guy thinks he’s so special, that he’s hot stuff, a real know-it-all if ever there was one, and good-looking. Actually he really is good looking with dark eyes and he has a terrific butt and—”

KiKi kicked my ankle, snapping me back to the situation at hand, which was *not* fixating on Boone’s butt. “Look,” I continued. “I took Boone’s car because he owes me, and with him on the run this was my chance to even the score a little. I lost everything in that divorce, including my own car that I paid for. Do you believe that? I want Walker Boone behind bars as much as you. If he were here in my house I’d call the police myself and applaud as they hauled his very nice-looking butt out of here.”

Tucker leaned in a little closer. “You got kind of a dopey look on your face.”

“That’s revenge,” KiKi chimed in.

“Sure doesn’t look like revenge.”

KiKi dropped the shaker on my foot.

“Ouch!” I yelped, an expression of pain and agony now replacing the dopey look, least I hoped so.

“Boone’s hiding somewhere in this city,” Tucker said. “I’d bet my last dollar on it. He’s going to try his best to pin Daddy’s murder on someone else, and I’m going to make sure he’s the one who goes to jail like he deserves.”

“And I’ll help you,” I said, lying my little heart out as Tucker started for the steps. “I’m sorry about your father,” I called after him. “Even if you two didn’t get along, it’s mighty hard to lose a parent,” I added, doing a little digging of my own.

Tucker stopped and trudged back up the steps, his eyes trying to focus. “What are you talking about? My daddy and I got along fine. We were best of pals.”

“Except he left the Old Harbor Inn to Walker Boone and not you,” I said, remembering what Ross told me earlier at the police station. “There had to be a good reason why he did such a thing.”

“Yeah, there is.” Conway’s eyes got even angrier than before. “Boone talked my daddy into changing his will is what happened. Boone threatened him, and Daddy had to do what he said because Daddy was afraid of Boone. He was a gang member, for crying out loud. You don’t mess with the gang, everyone knows that.”

“If Boone was into extortion, why not just demand money? Why the inn?”

Tucker’s face reddened, his eyes blazing mad. “How the heck should I know? Ask Boone, he’s the guilty one.” Tucker stumbled down the stairs and out the back door, as KiKi and I stared after him.

“I really do need to find a better hiding place for my spare key,” I said to myself as much as KiKi. “Do you think Tucker was poking around here looking for Walker because he’s so distraught over his daddy on a slab over at House of Eternal Slumber^[CE6]?”

KiKi picked up the shaker. “I don’t know about the distraught part, but there’s no doubt that Tucker wants Walker in jail and the sooner the better.”

I grabbed a towel from the hall closet to mop up the martini. “What if he’s the one who set Walker up to take the rap for the murder he committed? I bet Tucker didn’t much like that Daddy left the inn to Walker. That had to tick him off.”

“Except Tucker’s mamma was from money and left him the bulk of the estate when she died four years ago. It’s hard to imagine Tucker Adkins giving a hoot about fluffing pillows and room service. Maybe he truly is distraught over losing Conway.”

KiKi and I exchanged a *yeah, when pigs fly* look and KiKi added, “There’s some reason the old boy’s got a bee in his bonnet, and it’s more about finding Walker and putting him away than revenging poor dead Daddy. I wonder what Tucker Adkins is up to.”

“And how did Boone wind up in the middle of it.” I looked around the upstairs. “He’s out there, somewhere close.”

KiKi yawned and headed for the stairs. “You never know about Walker; he could be right under your nose and you’d ever see him unless he wanted you to.”