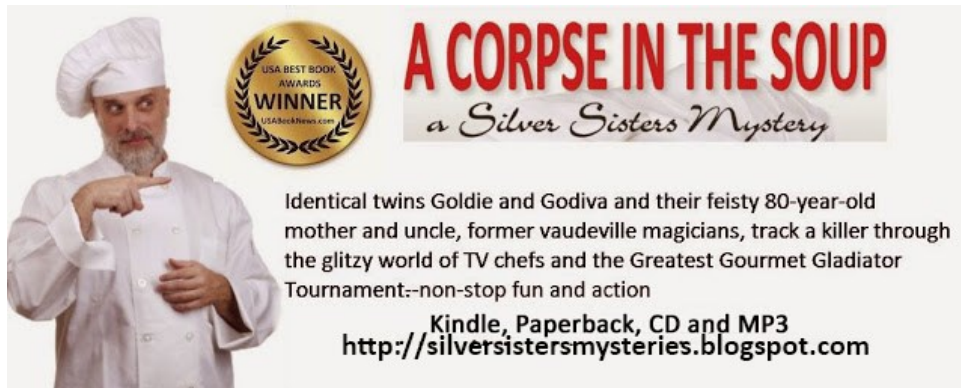




SAMPLE CHAPTER

~Chapter 1~

Godiva Olivia Dubois held the paper at arm's length, squinting to read the jagged script without her glasses. "You know, on days like today I think I should have stuck with my little column in the *Beverly Hills Blabbermouth* instead of becoming syndicated." When even the squinting didn't help, she finally put on her glasses and read out loud.

Dear G. O. D.,

I've prayed to The Lord for guidance, but he doesn't answer. The longer I stand by and watch, the more I know my mission. Time is running short now, so I'm turning to you. I have to know. Is it a sin to kill a monster?

Please tell me I won't go to Hell if I rid the world of this human piece of garbage. I don't do well in extreme heat. ~Mr. Clean

Maybe some joker is pulling my leg. She read it again, digested every word, then shuddered, and pushed it over to her mother.

"Mom, this letter is really spooky. Read it and see what you think."

Flossie picked up the creased ivory sheet. As it wobbled in her veined hand, she glanced up and down the page clicking her tongue. "You see, Godiva?"

She shook the paper under her daughter's nose. "That's exactly what I've been trying to tell you. When you write a column called *Ask G.O.D.*, don't be surprised if you get letters from nutcases."

Godiva snatched the letter back. "I should have known you'd say that." She marched across the room and plunked it down on the table. "Read this one, Unk. Mom thinks it's from a crank, but I'm afraid it might be real." Sterling Silver dropped the mail sack he was emptying onto the mahogany library table.

Holding the sheet like a dead skunk, his eyes crinkled as he strained to read. "Forget about it,

Honey. Sounds like a crank to me. Just stick to the funny ones. Remember, the audience loves a good laugh.”

“Yeah, I know, Unk, but something feels weird about this. I’m just not sure what to do.” Godiva retrieved the letter from him, put it back in the envelope and slipped it into the pocket of her embroidered silk jacket.

She scooped up another pile and started to plow through it. “What would I do without you guys? I feel like I’m swimming upstream.”

Flossie rolled her eyes. “Well you’re up to your neck, all right. Since the beginning of time people have asked God for advice, so what does my daughter do? She gives them an address! Did you listen to what I told you? Of course not. So our poor mailman’s getting a hernia schlepping letters from all these—” She made a sweep of the room with her hand. “These wackos.”

“Wackos sell papers, Mother. How do you think those tabloids can afford to pay out millions to settle libel suits?”

After slitting open a few more envelopes, Flossie waved a piece of pink paper at her. “Now, here’s a dilly. This woman’s husband dresses up like Mae West and wants her to go shopping for lingerie with him.”

A smile lit Godiva’s face. “Hmmm. Might have potential.”

“Hah! Listen to this. She wants to know if it’s all right for him to use the ladies’ dressing room if she goes in with him!”

Sterling let out a belly laugh. “You know, your goofy Uncle Lester used to dress up like a woman. Of course it was part of his vaudeville act, but he really did look a lot like Mae West.”

Flossie’s gray eyes glazed over, “Mae West, some gal! You know her mother made my Mama’s corsets. But Sterling, you’re all wet about Lester. He looked more like Bette Davis with a mustache. My beautiful girls are the real Mae West look-alikes. Strike a pose for me, Darling.”

Godiva put her hand on her generous hip and pursed her lips.

“You see, Sterling? If that gorgeous silver hair was phony platinum blonde, what would you have? Another Mae West!”

“You know, Flossie, you’ve got something there. And look at me.” He mimed an imaginary top hat and cane. “Rosy cheeks, a few pounds and I’m Maurice Chevalier.”

“Yeah, and I’m Marilyn Monroe!”

“Well, old girl, I’d say you’re more like Estelle Getty. You know, those Golden Girls on the TV.” Flossie flung a satin pillow in Sterling’s direction as he began to hum a few bars of “*Thank Heaven for Little Girls*.”

Godiva waved her arms, “Hey, back to business, you guys. The letter you’ve got there is a winner, Mom! Throw it in the red basket.”

Uncle Sterling dug through another canvas bag. “At the rate this stuff is rolling in, what we really need is two of you.”

“Well if you’re thinking about Goldie, I don’t think she’d help even if she lived near enough.”

Flossie looked up from the letters she was sorting and threw up her hands, palms out. “Such twins I’ve got! One daughter calls herself G.O.D. and tells people how to run their lives and the other one

lives in Alaska and chases bears out of her garbage.”

Sterling scooped the newest batch of envelopes into a yellow laundry basket. “Flossie, you sound like a crabby old Jewish mother. You know Goldie’s happy up there in her one-horse town with her handsome husband, Red and her beautiful daughter, Chili and the whole goofy Pepper clan. She loves selling all that old crap she calls antiques. Isn’t that all that really matters?”

“I guess you’re right.” Flossie sighed. “But I sure do miss my little Chili. I wonder if she plays with that doll I gave her for her last birthday. Remember, it had red curls just like hers?”

“Flossie old girl, there you go losing track of time again. You gave her that doll over ten years ago.”

“Yeah, Mom. She’s not little any more. Remember, she’s a sous chef on her dad’s cruise ship now.”

Flossie’s eyes brightened as she tapped her forehead with her fingertips. “How could I forget? She’s sailing around Alaska with Red.”

Sterling chuckled. “Not at the moment, Flossie. Tourist season just ended.”

Godiva grabbed at the pile of mail sliding off her lap. Chili, of course. I could use that girl. All I need to do is get her down here.

Staring into space, she fingered the creased ivory envelope in her pocket. She pulled it out, but even touching it gave her the creeps. *Oh Hell, I can’t deal with that now. Mom’s probably right. Just some nutcase.* She shoved the letter back into her jacket where it smoldered for several hours before it was forgotten.

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