

**The First Two Pages: “How Do You Mend a Broken Heart?” by Maggie King**

From *Murder by the Glass: Cocktail Mysteries*

Edited by Teresa Inge and Yvonne Saxon (Untreed Reads)

An essay by Maggie King

A pricey fundraiser brings together Richmond, Virginia’s elite. Enter two glamorous sisters, Kate and Becca, who are grieving the loss of their parents. What better way to mend their broken hearts than a hunt for rich husbands?

The requirements for submission to *Murder by the Glass* were fairly broad: “We are looking for short stories that blend a baffling mystery and a glass (or more) of murder!”

Here are the first two pages of “How Do You Mend a Broken Heart?” (the requisite glass appears later):

“You *really* think we’ll find ourselves a couple of rich husbands tonight?”

I laughed. “Just yesterday, you quoted from that book you love so much ... something about rich men on the hunt for wives.”

My sister Kate fussed with the neckline of her black lace top and recited from memory: “It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.”

“That’s the one.”

“It’s from *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen.”

“You always were the bookworm of the family.”

Moments before, Kate and I had arrived at the very fancy Mavis I. Paxton House, home of the River Edge Club, a private social club for Richmond, Virginia’s elite. After spending a mint on tickets for the *Springtime is Sweet* fundraiser, we wanted to look our best and

ducked into an elegant ladies' lounge for a primping session before making a grand entrance in the ballroom. Plus, we had those prospective rich husbands to consider.

The pricey tickets benefitted The Pantry, a Richmond food bank whose mission was to feed those in need—a mission near and dear to our Aunt Pauline's heart. Aunt Pauline was dying of pancreatic cancer and couldn't attend the fundraiser, so she had asked Kate and me to drive down from Northern Virginia to support her favorite cause. We never could say no to our beloved aunt.

Kate said, "If we're playing Jane Austen characters, I get to be Elizabeth Bennett, with first dibs on Mr. Darcy."

"Who?"

Kate huffed her frustration. "They're the main characters in *Pride and Prejudice*."

Kate spent her high school years holed up in her room, studying and reading the likes of Jane Austen. I ran with a wild crowd and was lucky to graduate. Eventually I found my talent in computers, but still rarely opened a book.

"Aunt Pauline said we'd have our pick of rich guys tonight," I said.

"Actually, Becca, she said *I* might find a rich husband and that tarty outfit you have on makes you mistress material." Kate finished touching up her makeup, plopped down in a red velvet love seat, and leaned her head back against the fancy gold paper that covered the walls.

I smiled as I refreshed my Red Sin lipstick. Aunt Pauline always spoke her mind. I glanced at Kate. She sat with crossed legs, the slit of her slinky skirt revealing a daring expanse of thigh. "What about you with that slit up to your unmentionables? That's assuming you're even wearing unmentionables."

"We won't mention them," Kate quipped. She fanned the fingers of her right hand, surveying her French manicure.

"I think I'm pretty modest tonight," I said. "Just a hint of cleavage." Although I'd probably gone overboard on raising the hemline of my white satin form-fitting dress. I'd worn the same dress when I married Arnie. Arnie, my now ex, a champ in the bedroom and at the shooting range—useless anywhere else.

"Did you see that great-looking guy when we arrived?" Kate asked. "The one standing behind the registration table?"

“Yes! Gorgeous Man!” I held a hand over my heart, miming a swoon.

“Wasn’t he to die for? Maybe he’s rich.”

“Let’s snag a dance with him.”

“Becca, do you ever wonder if that terrible business with Mama and Daddy caused Aunt Pauline’s cancer? I’ve heard that anger and resentment can do that. And she has a heap of resentment toward that man who lent Daddy that money.”

I fluffed my blond mane. “Let’s hope she’s an exception.”

I love exploring themes of money and the often-fraught relationship between the haves and the have-nots. Becca and Kate clearly aspire to be haves. Kate even quotes the famous opening line of Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*.

I open the story with Becca and Kate primping in an elegant ladies’ lounge before making grand entrances at an upscale event. I wanted to show the dynamics between the two sisters, who are very different. While Kate the bookworm enjoys the classics, Becca was a wild-child-turned-wild-adult with little interest in the written word.

Yet the sisters share a goal: finding a rich husband.

But wait! Where’s the baffling mystery? This sounds like a buildup to a steamy romance. Perhaps a contemporary version of *Pride and Prejudice*.

Fair question. As the title, *Murder by the Glass*, suggests, this is a crime anthology and readers are expecting more than a tale of two ditzy, broken-hearted gold diggers. Who’s the victim? What’s the crime?

Patience, dear readers. Stick around for the “more.”

Despite their seeming shallowness, the sisters have strong family ties and concerns. They're attending the fundraiser at the request of their Aunt Pauline, who is dying of cancer and couldn't attend the event. "We never could say no to our beloved aunt." Makes one wonder what else Aunt Pauline has asked them to do. And there was a "terrible business with Mama and Daddy"... what's up with that? And what about "that man who lent Daddy that money?" There's that money theme popping up again.

Truth and illusion are weaved into these pages, so tangled together that it's tough to tease them apart. Does that mean I'm lying to the reader? Or am I telling the truth? Well, um... perhaps *both*. When truth and illusion collide in the big reveal at the end, readers will be stunned (I hope). On reflection, they'll realize that I sprinkled clues and foreshadowing throughout—including on the first two pages.

There's more than one way to mend a broken heart.

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Maggie King is the author of the Hazel Rose Book Group mysteries, including *Murder at the Book Group*, *Murder at the Moonshine Inn*, and the upcoming *Laughing Can Kill You*. Her short stories appear in the *Virginia is for Mysteries* series, *50 Shades of Cabernet*, *Deadly Southern Charm*, *Death by Cupcake*, and *Murder by the Glass*. Maggie is a member of James River Writers, International Thriller Writers, Short Mystery Fiction Society, and is a founding member of Sisters in Crime Central Virginia, where she manages the chapter's Instagram account. In addition, she serves Sisters in Crime on the national level as a member of the Social Media team. Maggie graduated from Rochester Institute of Technology with a B.S. degree in Business Administration, and has worked as a software developer, retail sales manager, and customer service supervisor. She lives in Richmond, Virginia with her husband, Glen, and cats, Morris and Olive.