



A VIV AND CHARLIE MYSTERY

HOMICIDE for the HOLIDAYS

"A perfect holiday mystery!"

—TASHA ALEXANDER,
New York Times bestselling author
of *The Counterfeit Heiress*

CHERYL HONIGFORD

READING GROUP GUIDE



1. How do you think Vivian's father's death during her teenage years affected her? How have you been affected by the loss of a loved one, either during your adolescence or later in life?
2. Radio performances became less popular once TVs became affordable enough for people to have at home, but today podcasts have surged in popularity and brought back some of the enthusiasm for storytelling in an audio format. Do you listen to podcasts? If so, what are some of your favorites, and how does the experience of listening to a story differ from watching it on TV or in a movie?
3. Was the revelation about Graham's personal life surprising to you? Do you blame him for not telling Vivian and encouraging their faux romance? What kind of challenges might he face as an openly gay man in show business in the 1930s?

4. *The Darkness Knows* is sponsored by Sultan's Gold cigarettes, and they play commercials during the broadcast. How do old advertisements compare to today's TV and radio commercials? Do you have any favorite commercial jingles?
5. Vivian finds herself attracted to both Charlie and Martin. What are the similarities and differences between the two men? What do you think Vivian finds attractive about each?
6. How is Vivian able to reconcile the memory of the father she loved with the fact that he worked for Al Capone? Have you ever discovered a damaging secret about someone you were close to? How did it affect your relationship with that person?
7. Did you suspect who the murderer was at any point before the revelation? What were the clues that pointed you toward one suspect over another?
8. What do you think Vivian and Graham's relationship will be like now that their staged romance is over?

A CONVERSATION WITH THE AUTHOR

***Homicide for the Holidays* is the second book in the Viv & Charlie mystery series. What were some of the challenges of writing the second book as opposed to the first? Were there elements of the storytelling process that were easier this time around?**

I've never written a series, so that was the major challenge. In a series, you not only need to keep the individual plot of that particular book going but also keep all the balls in the air from the previous book while planting seeds for all future books.

Homicide for the Holidays was half-written when I signed the contract for the series, so I had most of the research done about radio, the time period, and Chicago. That made it easier to focus on the story itself.

Why did you decide to include Al Capone as a character in *Homicide for the Holidays*? Did you learn anything surprising about him as you were doing research for the book?

How could I write a series set in 1930s Chicago without mentioning Al Capone? Capone was actually in Alcatraz in December 1938, so it's really more the shadow of Capone and his era in this book. I based Vivian's father, Arthur Witchell, on a real life associate of Capone's named Eddie O'Hare (the father of the war hero Butch O'Hare and where O'Hare Airport got its name). I found Eddie's story first and then worked Capone into Arthur's story backward.

I think it's surprising how quickly Capone rose to the top and how short his reign in Chicago actually was. He took control of the organization in 1925 and was convicted of tax evasion in October 1931. In only six years he created such an international reputation that people still mention him today when I tell them I live in Chicago (along with Michael Jordan, of course).

What are some of your favorite films and radio shows from the 1930s?

Radio shows: *Jack Benny*, *Lights Out*, *Big Town*, *Burns and Allen*, *Lux Radio Theatre*, *Mercury Theatre on the Air*. My absolute favorite radio show, *Suspense*, didn't come on the air until 1942.

Films: *The Thin Man*, *My Man Godfrey*, *Bringing Up Baby*, *It Happened One Night*, *Top Hat*, *Swing Time*, *Red Dust*. (There are too many to mention, but I love anything screwball comedy, musical, or pre-code.)

Who are some of your favorite authors? Do you think any of them have inspired your writing style?

I was directly inspired to try my hand at historical mystery (with a dash of romance) by Deanna Raybourn and Tasha Alexander. I think everything I've read influences my writing style. I think what most directly influenced it, though, was writing notes to my friends in high school. I learned to inflect drama and excitement into the events of an otherwise boring fifth period study hall.

What do you think Vivian would be like if she had lived in the twenty-first century? Would she have a career or a family, or both? How would her relationship with Charlie change?

A woman in the 1930s usually chose one or the other—career or marriage and family (if she had the luxury to be able to choose). You don't see many women from that period that were successful as actresses and also had happy home lives. (Think Joan Crawford, Bette Davis, etc....) One or the other usually suffered. I'm sure there were women who made it work, but the gender roles were so much more rigidly defined then.

You see Vivian struggle with the idea of marriage in this book (and even more so in the next book in the series). I think it might still be a struggle for her in the twenty-first century, but her options wouldn't be nearly as limited. After all, I have

a career and family (though I'm not entirely sure of my level of success with either...kidding), but at least I have the option.

I think her relationship with Charlie would probably be a little more relaxed in the twenty-first century. He's supportive of her acting career in the 1930s, but is a little threatened by her independence. I don't think that would be such a threat to him in the twenty-first century. I'd like to think Charlie would support Vivian's career ambitions—and also gladly cook dinner and do the laundry.