

# A Killer Groove



ROCK MUSIC ISN'T DEAD...  
IT'S GOT A KILLER GROOVE



**G.M.HAGUE**

A Lukas Boston Mystery

# **A Killer Groove**

**By**

**G.M.Hague**

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book in PDF form from my website at:

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Lukas Boston books are not episodes of a larger story and it isn't necessary to read them in correct order, although the backgrounds to some of the characters and events will be made clearer if you do. If you'd like to be told when other Lukas Boston stories are available, I've created a newsletter at [www.graemehague.com.au](http://www.graemehague.com.au) you can sign up—I promise not to send you anything except info on Lukas Boston, myself, my books and my music.

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## **DEDICATION.**

This one's got to go to The Peaks blues band ... well, sort of blues and anything else we wanted to play, The Peaks being Geoff Rowe, Mike Scott, Patrick Steinbacher and myself. Before a gig, we sat around drinking pints and someone suggested this would be a good idea for a book. Also, apologies to bass players the world over—of which I am one.

## **A BRIEF APOLOGY.**

My Lukas Boston Mysteries aren't exactly totally devoid of obscene and (for some) offensive language. This book, being about rock and roll, bands, musicians and murder, gets even more salty at times. I worked in the industry for decades (not the murder bit, obviously) and let me assure you, most old rockers use profanity for punctuation. I've *still* dialled the bad language way back. Sorry for any offense.

## A Killer Groove

# ONE

The bar room air was thick with smoke machine mist, the moving lights cutting coloured beams through the haze, splashing off the walls and ceiling. On stage the music faded away untidily as the band stopped playing one by one, each of them becoming aware something was wrong. In the silence you could hear the shocked whispering of the small crowd as it began pushing across the dance floor for a closer look. The place stank of spilled alcohol, body odour and a faint whiff of vomit—and now something else. The smell of burnt flesh. Stunned, they gathered around and stared in disbelief.

The show was over. Killing the bass player in the middle of a song will do that.

The group's lead singer, a stunningly attractive girl half the age of the others, threw her hands to her mouth. 'Oh my God, is he all right? What's wrong with him?'

The guitarist edged across to see. A mixture of revulsion and fear stopped him from bending down too close and touching anything, particularly not the body with its wide sightless eyes and frozen grimace of agony.

'He's cooked,' he reported and glanced towards the bass amplifier. Wisps of smoke arose from it. 'He's been fried, I reckon.'

'I told him to stop drinking *and* taking that shit,' the drummer called from behind the kit, annoyed.

'No, he's cooked as in *dead*, Jimmy. Not cooked as in bugged.'

'Oh... shit, are you sure?'

'As a dodo, mate.'

'Bloody hell.'

'Exactly what I was thinking.' The guitar player, called Marco clicked his tongue in dismay and couldn't help wondering if they'd still get paid for the gig. He needed the cash.

The girl let out a sob. 'For God's sake, shouldn't someone give him CPR or something? The kiss of life? He might not be properly dead yet.'

They all exchanged a glance, not relishing the idea. 'Nah, I think he's properly cooked,' Marco said. He was closest and most likely the one expected to do it. The bass player's open mouth showed a string of saliva and tobacco-stained teeth. He'd always had bad breath.

One member of the audience, his face animated with horror and excitement, said, 'Is this part of the act? It's just part of the show, right? That's *awesome*.'

It wasn't an unreasonable question. All of the band members and many of the nightclub patrons wore gothic black clothing complete with grinning skull motifs and satanic crosses. Death was a common theme, but just not the real thing.

'Well it is *now*,' Marco told him ruefully. 'But it's kind of hard to follow.'

## TWO

‘Thank you for coming in so promptly, Mr Boston.’ Dan Wharman spoke smoothly, gesturing Lukas Boston to a chair. ‘Would you like a coffee?’

Lukas shook his head. The room was filled by a long table surrounded by leather office chairs. A small bar with spirits dispensers and a cappuccino machine was at one end. The walls were covered in framed gold records, awards certificates, autographed concert posters and pictures of famous musicians. Before he sat down Lukas did a slow circuit. Most of the faces meant nothing to him, then he saw someone he knew.

‘Hey, didn’t this guy go to jail for underage sex?’

Wharman came to look, peering at the photograph. ‘Oh, right—was it him? For Christ’s sake, he shouldn’t be still up here.’ He took the picture down and placed it in the floor, facing the wall.

Lukas pointed at another. ‘And this guy shot his girlfriend. Said it was an accident and he didn’t know the gun was loaded.’

Wharman took that one down, too.

‘This bloke looks familiar,’ Lukas began, stepping sideways.

‘Lukas—do you mind, can I call you that? Can we sit down?’ Wharman herded Lukas away from the wall.

‘A real recording company,’ Lukas said, taking a seat. ‘I thought you’d all gone broke?’

‘We’re real enough, but yes, hardly in our halcyon days,’ Wharman said, dropping into a chair next to a pile of documents and CDs. Lukas sat opposite him. Wharman sounded like a veteran of the music industry, but he couldn’t have been more than twenty five years old. His trendy haircut annoyed Lukas immensely, the tailored suit measured to within a millimetre. Wharman’s face glowed with moisturiser and his manicured fingernails had a suspicious, glossy appearance. He went on expansively, ‘Piracy, the internet, plus every man and his dog’s got a damned home recording studio in their garden shed—and don’t get me started on those bloody independent labels. It’s almost impossible to make a dollar in music these days.’

Lukas said, 'Nothing to do with the shit music you're putting out, then?'

Wharman gave him a tight smile and tossed one of the CDs over the table. 'Ever heard of these guys? They'd be around your vintage, I'd say.'

Lukas picked it up. 'Constant Black? Sure, I've heard about them, but that's all.' He turned it over. 'This was about twenty five years ago? Hang on...'

Wharman waited for him.

'Now I remember. These guys had the lead singer who died in a hotel room in the middle of nowhere, right?'

Nodding, Wharman said, 'Zavier Dreamer.' He shrugged at the flamboyant name. 'He was ten times bigger than the band, so when he killed himself the group never recovered. They tried with another front man for a while, but it was a waste of time and the band didn't go beyond the two albums they released with Dreamer. That is, until now.'

Lukas looked up from reading the cover. 'Surprise, surprise, they've reformed like every other band in the last fifty years?'

'With a new singer, the daughter of Zavier Dreamer, called Kelli. Sounds mad, but who would have thought it? Things have been coming together and Constant Black has got a foot in the door of the business again. It helps to have a gorgeous girl at the front doing the singing. Put her in a short skirt and no knickers, and who gives a shit if she can hit a note?' Wharman barked out a laugh. 'I mean, especially if she takes the attention away from the old bastards behind her.'

Lukas was looking inside the cover now and found a picture of the band. Two decades ago there was a lot of hair, black tee shirts, denim, studded leather and tattoos. Even so, Zavier Dreamer's clean skin and boyish good looks stood out. 'It's all very interesting, but I can't see what I can do for you.'

'Ah, here's the unfortunate thing, Lukas. You see, Constant Black's bass player was killed last week, electrocuted on stage smack in the middle of a big performance and in front of hundreds and *hundreds* of punters. Tragic stuff, everyone loved him and he'll be sadly missed by everyone here...' Wharman searched through his documents. 'Bill Pusham—Bill, the bass player. Great guy.'



Lukas recalled seeing a brief news story somewhere. ‘So I guess that’s the end of Constant Black’s big come-back?’

‘Like hell, downloads are going through the roof, the video of the accident has gone viral and the band’s Facebook page has gained an extra two thousand likes. Constant Black could be bigger than the Rolling Stones by the end of the week, the rate this is going. We’ve already got someone to stand in for Bob and we’ll make it official when the time’s right.’

‘Bob?’

‘The dead bass player.’

‘You mean Bill. He was a great guy, remember?’

‘Right, Bill. We’ve got another bass player for him. It’s all systems go for a tribute show within a week.’

‘That’s very touching, Dan. I still don’t see how I can help you.’

Wharman pulled a face. ‘The police have launched an investigation as a matter of course. It looks like just an accident and the guy was well known for messing around with his own equipment, trying different things, sticking wires and shit where you shouldn’t put them. He definitely cooked himself, if you ask us. Still, the cops aren’t saying much and we want you to make enquiries of your own on our behalf.’

Frowning, Lukas said what he told everyone, ‘The police are far more equipped for that kind of thing than I am. I can’t do anything better.’

‘Maybe Lukas, but this is a death metal band we’re talking about or at least a heavy metal group,’ Wharman paused, deciding. ‘Maybe progressive rock with Kelli at the front... or new wave metal?’

Lukas waited.

Wharman shrugged to himself. ‘Whatever, the entire band and all their crew—and most of their audience for that matter—aren’t the type of people who will pass a drug test, you know what I’m saying?’ Wharman mimed smoking a joint and pumping a syringe into his arm. ‘No one’s going to say much to a policeman. On the other hand, you’re a private detective who only reports back to us and nothing goes any further. Everything’s in-house and nobody else needs to know, right?’

‘Okay, but what if I do find evidence of foul play?’

‘You tell us, we’ll pass it on to the authorities, I promise.’

Lukas thought it over. ‘Why not leave it alone? You said yourself, the police enquiries should be just routine and they’ll go away. I might stir up more trouble than you want.’

‘Covering our bets Lukas, that’s all.’ Wharman tried to assure him with a wide smile, which switched to looking alarmed when Lukas got up to leave.

‘Sorry, something doesn’t feel right. Find someone else.’

‘Okay, okay, wait a second,’ Wharman waved him down again. ‘You’re a smart guy and you can see there’s more to it. That’s good.’

‘Then why don’t you just tell me? It’ll be quicker and cheaper for you.’ Lukas tapped his watch to remind Wharman he charged by the hour.

‘All right. Look, if Bob’s death turns out—’

‘You mean, Bill.’

‘Right, if *Bill’s* death turns out to be anything other than a terrible accident, we’ve got a big problem on our hands. The band is finally bringing in some bucks for us, like a return on our investment and they could hit the big time again, you know what I’m saying? The trouble is, if someone killed him, then all this extra money we’re seeing from the publicity...’ Wharman spread his hands and looked helpless.

Lukas finished for him, ‘It might be considered as proceeds from criminal activity and you don’t get a cent. At best, it could be frozen for years while you argue about it.’

‘You’re good, Lukas,’ Wharman cocked a finger at him. ‘They said you were good.’

‘You don’t seriously expect me to cover up a murder for you, if I find one?’

‘No, absolutely not. Just give us a heads-up, if you find anything suspicious before the police do. Maybe some advance notice like a few hours and *we’ll* do any covering up—from a purely accounting point of view,’ Wharman added quickly.

He watched Lukas keenly, nervously tapping his fingers.

‘I still don’t know, something tells me to forget it.’ Lukas gazed around at the rogue’s gallery of photographs on the walls.

‘Come on, it’s only rock’n’roll, Lukas. Anything you don’t like, feel free to take straight to the authorities yourself. In fact, I insist that you do.’

Lukas thought some more, saying absently, ‘You know, I used to be in a band myself. I was the drummer. Everyone said we should have made an album.’

Wharman slapped the table. ‘And I’d *love* to hear any demo tapes you’ve still got, Lukas. Seriously, retro is all the rage at the moment.’

Lukas ignored the fleeting twitch of hope in his gut. ‘All right, I’ll see what I can do.’ He got up, shaking Wharman’s hand and scooping up the CD. ‘About the bass player, I mean.’

‘You’re a good man, Lukas.’ Wharman hurried to get the door for him.

As Lukas was leaving he stopped at another photograph, knocking the glass with his knuckle. ‘He did ten years for tax evasion and fraud.’

Wharman sighed and took it down.

## THREE

Lukas went home to his second storey apartment, which he owned in an expensive inner-city Melbourne suburb. The old red brick building had been converted into luxury units and the ground floor surrounded by trimmed lawns and sculptured trees, now tended by a groundskeeper.

An ex-police detective who left the force voluntarily in front of a wave of scandal—taking much of the blame and saving many of Lukas’ colleagues a similar fate—and becoming a private investigator, Lukas shouldn’t have been able to afford such a home. However, his very wealthy parents had retired to a sun-soaked beach, and handed over the keys to a substantial income stream. Lukas couldn’t run out of money if he’d tried.

Inside his apartment Lukas took a deep breath of fresh, free-of-any-commitment air. Just to be sure, he called out, ‘Anybody home?’

Silence answered him and Lukas smiled to himself, pleased. He was living alone again, the way he liked it.

Lukas was in a complicated relationship with a defense lawyer called Karen Roland. Since career-wise they frequently stood on opposite sides of the legal fence discretion was necessary. The deal was that Karen could sleep with anyone she wanted and Lukas wasn’t allowed to complain. In turn, Lukas was allowed to have sex with any woman he wanted, as long as Karen never found out. This was unfair, but arguing with a defense lawyer was difficult, especially when you’re naked.

For the last four weeks Karen had been living in his apartment while her own flat was being redecorated. Finally, as promised, she had moved back out today. As an experiment in enforced domesticity it failed. Both agreed monogamy sucked and co-habiting seriously cramped your style. It was much better to meet occasionally, get legless drunk and bitch about work, then stagger into bed together.

No doubt Lukas would find panties under the bed, cotton buds stuffed down the sink and chocolate wrappers behind the sofa, but she was gone.

Lukas tossed his keys, phone and wallet onto a divider, dropped a plastic bag of take-away Chinese food onto a table and rummaged in his fridge for a beer. A few minutes later, relaxing in his favourite chair, the food and beer within reach and the Constant Black CD in his stereo, Lukas prepared to do some research into his latest client.

Then he realised he wasn't alone after all. Someone was standing in the corner behind him.

Lukas said easily, 'You're going to have to do a bit more than gate-crash my dinner, if you want me to help you out. You're lucky Karen never saw you. She would have found some kind of legal thing to get rid of you. She has this weird, jealousy shit happening. Even being dead wouldn't make any difference.'

His visitor was a woman in her early thirties, attractive with long dark hair and a slim build. Her pale face was perpetually sad. That made sense—Lukas was yet to see a *happy* spirit since his grandmother's inherited, so-called Gift had blossomed into regular conversations with the Dead. It was hard to know how long ago this girl had passed and nothing told Lukas why. Her clothing was modern, anytime in the last twenty years was possible. Usually the ghosts eventually said or did something to give Lukas a clue why they were bothering him. It was rarely a *good* clue. They could be annoyingly vague.

Lukas turned in his chair, straining his neck to see her. 'Have you got anything to say for yourself today?'

Surprising him, she spoke. '*You don't know what you're doing, you never get it right. You'll kill someone, some day.*' Then the ghost faded into nothing.

'Thanks for the vote of confidence, but it's a start, I suppose,' Lukas said, groping for his beer and pointing a remote at his hi-fi system. 'Mind you, I don't blame you for not hanging around and listening to this shit.'

He was tempted to turn the music up loud enough to annoy his neighbour, Irene. She was the Chairwoman of the Owners Standards Committee and although everyone owned their apartments, standards of behaviour were expected. Irene regarded Lukas as disappointing in all respects. He considered Irene as an overweight, interfering busybody determined to make his life miserable, because she fed off his pain like some parasitic alien from outer space.

Which kind of made them even in Lukas' mind, so he hadn't ever pulled out his Glock and shot Irene—yet.

Even the prospect of irritating Irene wasn't worth playing Constant Black any louder than he needed. After hearing several tracks Lukas wasn't a fan of the band at all, but he could appreciate the complexities of the music and underlying melodies that gave Constant Black a difference from the other heavy metal bands he'd heard. These subtle nuances were no doubt the influence of Zavier Dreamer, the missing ingredient that the band couldn't reproduce after the singer's death. Zavier's voice also had a high, warbling quality that wouldn't be easy to mimic.

'For Christ's sake, that'll do me,' Lukas said, clicking off the CD. Besides, he'd run out of beer and the remains of his pork in black bean sauce was congealing in the bottom of the container, looking like something no one should ever have eaten. He got up, wrapped the scraps into a bag and grabbed another beer.

Lukas was curious what the latest incarnation of the band sounded like and, promising just to watch a few minutes, he booted up a laptop and began surfing the net. It didn't take long to find a grainy, bootleg video of Constant Black playing in a club. The vision was from a handheld smart phone that jerked and jumped so much it gave Lukas a headache.

All the same, he could see what Dan Wharman was talking about.

Kelli Dreamer had the longest legs in the world, topped by the shortest miniskirt in the known universe. Her pouting, pale freckled face, full lips and mess of red hair shouted at the screen, "I'm a naughty girl, come and sleep with me," in every language except whatever nuns spoke. Kelli moved like a wet dream. Lukas eventually noticed that her high, female vocal was the perfect substitute for her father's castrated piping.

All this from a shitty, pirated internet video. Lukas looked forward to meeting Kelli Dreamer in the flesh. He watched the clip again.

'Dump the band, you stupid girl,' he told her.

When Lukas went to bed he was tortured by mental images of Kelli Dreamer strutting the stage. He was half-tempted to call Karen and ask her to come over.

'Jesus, are you mad? You just got rid of her,' Lukas said aloud.

Before he turned out the light Lukas checked the corners of his bedroom for any sad-looking spectres watching him sleep. He was alone, apparently.

Which made a nice change.

## FOUR

The one thing Lukas didn't have, thanks to the creep of prime real estate, was a garage. He normally parked his new car in the street under a birch tree, the streetlight on the other side illuminating it at night. It had taken some months to convince his neighbours not to steal this spot. Casually revealing his holstered weapon during negotiations worked best. Calling his car "new" was only relative compared to Lukas' previous one, a trusty ex-pursuit Ford, which he'd recently parked too close to Port Phillip Bay after someone sabotaged his brakes. The Ford had finished a wild ride across the beach and into the ocean submerged up to its windscreen in polluted sea water. The tow truck driver had found a crab in the back seat.

Lukas now drove another ex-police car, again a Ford, a few years more recent than his last. It wasn't that Lukas couldn't afford anything better. Practicality ruled his choice. He often travelled to parts of the city where a nice, expensive vehicle would never stay where he left it for very long. Car thieves weren't so attracted to his plain, white sedan.

Listening to the CD some more, Lukas drove out to see Gary Beale, the keyboard player from Constant Black and the only member of the band who appeared to have carved out some kind of career for himself apart from Constant Black's fractured existence. Gary was a music producer and a manager, modestly successful enough according to his website and Facebook pages, although Lukas knew this could mean nothing.

Beale's house was spread across a large property and protected by high walls and a security gate. The long, low house sprawled around a swimming pool and a dilapidated tennis court. White stucco brickwork gleamed in the spring sunshine.

Lukas pressed a button at the gate and waited a long time until a disinterested voice came from a speaker.

'Who are you?'

'Lukas Boston. Dan Wharman should have told you I'd be coming.'

'Yeah, right... kind of busy. Did you make an appointment?'



‘No, because you’re not my bloody dentist. Have you been playing with any dead bass players lately?’

‘All right, no need to be a smart arse. Come around the back of the house.’

With a clunk and squeaking the gate began moving. Juddering as it slid aside, Lukas worried it would open all the way. Then, as he drove up the driveway Lukas noticed the lawns were overgrown, the garden beds ragged and full of weeds among the untended plants. It seemed that Gary Beale hadn’t made any hit records lately.

After parking beside a stagnant pond, Lukas picked his way around the rear of the house towards the swimming pool. Now he could see paint flaking everywhere, wrought iron fencing coated in rust, the paving cracked and lifting. The entire house, like Gary Beale, was long past its heyday.

There was nothing at all wrong with the five bikini-clad girls lounging on recliners around the pool, their oiled skin shining in the sun. They all sat up at Lukas’ arrival and made cooing noises at him, lifting their sunglasses to see him better. None of them was more than twenty years old. All combined, there wasn’t enough bikini material to make a handkerchief.

Lukas was used to getting the attention of women. Right now, he felt like a lamb that had wandered into a lioness enclosure.

‘Hello, I’m... ah, looking for Gary Beale.’

‘Wouldn’t you like a swim first?’ one of them answered. ‘It’s very hot and you’re wearing a *lot* of clothes.’

‘Thanks, but I haven’t brought anything to swim in,’ Lukas said past a sudden lump in his throat.

‘Oh, I would hope *not*. Neither have we,’ she said, plucking at her bikini. ‘We wouldn’t go in the water wearing these dreadful things.’

‘No, of course not. Ah, is Gary inside?’

The girls started to move his way. Lukas was reminded of a zombie movie where the Undead begin to shuffle towards their next victim—except he couldn’t think of any better fate than being overwhelmed by these gorgeous creatures.

His feet treacherously shifted Lukas closer to the house and his lips said, ‘I’ll have a look in here, shall I? For Gary, I mean.’

Lukas wasn't sure how that happened.

Waving him goodbye, the girls regrouped back at the pool and went into a huddle, possibly planning their next flesh-feasting attack.

Lukas pushed through a sliding glass door and found himself in a large room filled with music gear, microphones and a recording console. At the mixing desk sat Gary Beale absorbed with a computer screen. He was tall and thin, and despite his age had an afro shock of hair that was more startling by being completely grey. His thick-rimmed glasses gave him an owlish look.

Without looking up, Gary said, 'Why didn't you tell me you were coming?'

'Because you wouldn't have said that I could,' Lukas said, idly touching the gear, sliding the faders and pushing buttons. Something made a loud squeal and he guiltily dropped his hands.

Gary tapped a computer keyboard and sat back in his chair. 'You're right, but since you're here, let's get this over and done with. What's the point of it all anyway?'

Lukas helped himself to a stool. 'Who's that out there? Family come to visit?'

'That, Mr Boston, will be the next, latest singing sensation to hit the charts. They're called The Flower Girls and there's Rose, Daisy, Lily, Iris and Violet. See the poster?'

Lukas searched the walls. The scantily-clad girls were posed beside the pool, all of them holding microphones in a way that caused blood pressure issues for any man, the girls' names printed under each of them in case anybody was interested in that small detail.

'They're all singers?'

'I wouldn't go *that* far,' Gary glanced at the computer screen. 'With technology we can make up for any shortfalls in talent. Otherwise they've all got... everything else required. It's a work in progress.'

'Right,' Lukas said, looking out the window and momentarily distracted by one of the girls bending over at the poolside.

'Do you want me to draw the blinds?'

'No, no, that won't be necessary.'

'What is necessary, Mr Boston?'

‘We just need a chat about your dead friend, Bill.’

Gary sighed. ‘He was a *bass* player, Mr Boston. A dime a dozen, go down to the local supermarket and you’ll find them in aisle twelve, bottom shelf on the right. If you must know, we’ll have replaced him by the end of the week, or so I’m told.’

‘Really?’

‘What do you think? Constant Black is on a roll at long last and we’re not going to let a silly thing like Bill toasting his own balls stop us cashing in while we still can.’

‘Your grief is touching, Gary.’

‘Oh, for God’s sake we’ve been fighting cat-and-dog for decades, and Bill has been a right pain in the arse more than most. I wouldn’t wish him dead, but I’m not going to cry in my pillow all week either. Anyway, why do we have to tell *you* all this?’

‘Would you rather tell the police everything?’

‘I don’t want to tell them any damned thing.’

‘Your record company wants some reassurance, that’s all. A private investigation to clarify things. Nothing will go any further, no matter what,’ Lukas lied, as another scene outside caught his eye. The girls were reapplying suntan oil on each other. All over.

‘I wouldn’t be surprised if the damned record company wants a pint of blood from all of us, too.’ Gary lost his bluster and blew out his cheeks. ‘Fuck it, you want a beer?’

*Can we drink it out by the pool?* ‘Sure, why not? It’s a hot day.’

As Gary gave him a cold can of lager, Lukas extended his hand. ‘Call me Lukas, I guess you’re having a bad week.’

‘We’re having a bad decade,’ Gary said ruefully, sitting back down. ‘That security gate isn’t just for your benefit. It keeps out the bankers, the debt collectors and a whole pack of wolves. Constant Black is my lifeline—that and those five nymphomaniacs out there by the pool. If you want to know the truth, we were already running out of steam when Bill got killed. Now thanks to social bloody media and YouTube we’re all the rage again and we have to

make the most of it.' He took a long drink and lit up a cigarette. Lukas did the same and helped to fill the room with self-pitying smoke.

'I thought the band sounded pretty good with Kelli singing,' he said, wondering if Kelli had a swimming pool and hated bikinis, too. And needed suntan oil all over.

'She can sing fantastic, we can *play* fantastic, but none of us can write a damned song to save our lives. That was the legacy of her old man, Zavier. He wrote everything, see? Now we're already getting stale, running out of stuff to play. Two CDs with twenty songs in all? The punters are bored and the gigs are drying up.'

'I suppose you're the manager, too?'

'Nope, we're well and truly tied into *another* contract for that, too. Useless bastard called Angus Nectre. Sweet Management, he calls himself. Prick couldn't post a letter to himself without getting the address wrong. You call that management?'

'All the same, the future's looking bright?'

'Stellar mate, bloody stellar.'

Lukas took a drag of his smoke and figured the question had to be asked.

'So, apart from the fact that Bill was a bass player, he couldn't write songs and he was a pain in the arse for twenty years, you didn't have any reason to arrange his accidental death?'

Gary thought about it. 'He screwed my first wife behind my back, but he did me a favour. I could get rid of her after that. Besides, I shagged Bill's girlfriend to get even.'

'How did that work out for you?'

'I got a dose of the pox, then I gave it to my soon-to-be ex-wife, when we stupidly got back together for a few days. Apparently it doesn't clear up as fast as I thought.'

Lukas winced. 'Okay, *apart* from being a bass player, he couldn't write songs, you hated him for twenty years, he shagged your wife and indirectly gave you venereal disease... you wouldn't want to kill him?'

'Not really, I suppose.'

There was a silence while they both sipped beer and smoked some more. Lukas said, 'I'm curious, so why don't you get someone else to write your songs? I mean, I was in a band for a while. People thought we were pretty good...'

'What's the point? Even if people were fooled into thinking they were our songs, the composer gets most of the royalties, the record company gets the rest, and the poor, stupid band works its arse off playing crappy gigs in stinking nightclubs for next to nothing. No thanks,' Gary looked like he was going to spit on the floor.

'Right, the bloody record companies,' Lukas offered. It seemed the right thing to say.

'What we really need is for someone to unearth that damned secret album of Xavier's, that's what,' Gary pointed his cigarette at Lukas.

'The what?'

'Didn't they tell you? Xavier recorded a solo album just before he died. We all played a little bit on it. Not much, but enough to know what he was doing. People who heard the early mixes reckon it's brilliant—*brilliant*. No one knows where the master tapes are, or if they do they're not telling anyone. They're like an unknown Beatles album or—or, a rediscovered Hendrix record, get it?'

'I get it,' Lukas said, not wanting to burst the improbable bubble of Gary's ego making comparisons between Constant Black and the greats. 'Except why would these recordings be any good to you?'

'We do the songs ourselves, of course. It can be Constant Black reborn. Tweak a note here, chuck in a solo there... get co-writer's credits and make a million.'

'But they wouldn't be your songs to play in the first place.'

Gary turned sly. 'No, not ours, but Kelli would own the copyright lock, stock and barrel and she's in the band now, yeah? There's been talk that when Kelli turns twenty five years old next year, which is when she gets full control of her old man's estate, she'll also be given access to those session tapes. The lawyers will 'fess up they've had them all along and hand them over.'

'In turn she'll just hand them over to you?'

‘What else would she do? Besides, what good’s any of Xavier Dreamer’s music without the rest of Constant Black to perform it?’

‘Without Bill?’

Gary dismissed it. ‘We’re finding another bass player about the same age and we’ll tell everyone he was an original member of the band, before Bill and before when we got famous. He left Constant Black and went to medical school or something. Bands do it all the time.’

‘Clever,’ Lukas said, thinking that Gary had given this problem some thought. And Lukas figured Gary was dreaming—Zavier Dreamer’s missing recordings would be worth a lot more in their original state rather than being reworked by the ageing band. Really, Constant Black’s involvement might be seen as a hindrance, not a good thing. At the same time, the band’s connection to the material would be hard to break.

It occurred to Lukas that quietly taking them out of the equation—or not so quietly with a hot-wired bass guitar making a start—might be an attractive solution to somebody.

They were interrupted by one of the girls slinking into the room. The brief, white bikini was a contrast to her tanned skin and long, dark hair. She draped herself familiarly on Lukas’ shoulder.

‘Hello, who’s this? A new friend of yours, Gary?’

‘This is Lukas and he’s a private investigator,’ Gary said reluctantly, as if letting her through the door was a bad idea. ‘Lukas, meet Lily.’

‘Nice to meet you, Lily.’ Lukas tried to shake her hand, which was idly fondling his chest like a curious spider. He managed to waggle one of her fingers.

‘A private investigator? How exciting.’

‘A *very* private investigator.’

‘How *very* exciting.’

‘Are you the lead singer of The Flower Girls?’ Lukas’ mind was straying to other things, mostly about how tenuous an arrangement were the knots holding her bikini together. *Just an accidental snag on Luka’s coat and suddenly...*

‘Oh, none of us is the lead of anything, we do everything together,’ she said, although a shadow in her eyes suggested this was the standard party line. ‘Unless you want to lead me astray, Lukas?’ Lily held her face close, her breath warm on Lukas’ cheek as she spoke softly into his ear.

‘I wouldn’t want to get you into any trouble,’ Lukas said weakly.

‘Now, what would you call trouble, Lukas? How can a girl get into trouble when there’s a *very* private detective like you on her case?’

Lukas already had a mental list he was considering.

‘Ooh! What’s this?’ Lily’s wandering fingers had found Lukas’ holstered Glock.

‘It’s my gun. It’s okay, I’m allowed to carry it.’ Lukas noticed that Gary looked a little nervous.

‘My, it’s impressive, Lukas. Very *macho* and sexy. Tell me, have you ever shot anyone, like a bad guy? For real?’ Lily’s breathing had quickened and she was pressing herself against Lukas more.

‘You meet a lot of bad people in my line of work,’ Lukas said in his deepest voice. ‘Let’s just say you have to be prepared to do anything it takes to get the job done.’

‘You know *I’m* prepared to do whatever it takes too, Lukas.’

One of the bikini knots was loosening under the pressure of Lily rubbing against him. Lukas was watching it intently. ‘That’s good to know, Lily.’

‘Can you think of anything I should do? Perhaps something we can do together?’

Lukas had an idea immediately. He wisely kept it to himself.

‘Well, we’ve only just met, so—’

‘Lily, love—this was a business meeting,’ Gary broke into Lukas’ fantasy. ‘What do you want?’

Lily gave up tormenting Lukas for the moment. ‘We’re bored, Gary. When are we going to do some more recording?’

‘I told you, when I’ve finished mixing these backing tracks. I won’t be too much longer.’

‘Can Lukas come out to play while you do it?’

‘I’m sure Lukas has more important things to do.’

‘Have you, Lukas?’ As he opened his mouth to say that maybe a quick swim wasn’t entirely out of the question, she asked, ‘Has Lukas heard our songs? Is that why he’s here?’

Lukas said, ‘No, I haven’t listened to anything, sorry.’

‘Gary, *please* play Lukas one of our songs?’

‘Jesus, Lily if I do, will you promise to let Lukas go and allow me to get back to work?’

Lily pretended to consider this seriously, screwing her face up. ‘All right, but only because you’re starting to get bad-tempered.’

Lukas swore silently about the swimming pool scrubbed off the agenda. Gary punched buttons on his computer and music burst out of the speakers. The three of them sat still, earnestly listening like their lives depended on it. It was a saccharine-sweet, pop tune of girlish harmonies and a melodic hook that was indistinguishable from a thousand other songs just like it. The polite requirement to listen to the entire song made it a long three and a half minutes.

‘What do you think?’ Lily said anxiously when the music faded.

‘It’s good—fine,’ Lukas gave her an awkward thumbs-up. *Three and a half minutes of his life he’d never get back.*

‘Really?’

‘Well, it’s not my *thing*, but it’s great. Really good.’

‘Is he being honest, Gary?’

Gary said, ‘How should I know? Now a promise is a promise, Lily. Piss off back to the pool and leave us alone until I call you.’

‘Bye, Lukas. It was very nice to meet you. Come back again, won’t you?’ Lily kissed Lukas on the cheek, her lips lingering and with a hint of tongue, then with a rebellious swing of her hips Lily swayed out of the room, waving over her shoulder.

‘Don’t let the little girl act fool you,’ Gary said, watching Lukas recover. ‘They all do it and they can turn into vicious princesses in the blink of an eye. Before you ask, yes they’re all over eighteen. I’m not that stupid.’

‘Are they living here?’

‘For the moment, while we do these recordings.’



‘How can you stand it?’

‘I don’t have to. Sure, the girls know how to drive me insane by prancing around half-naked most of the time. It’s like living in a high school dormitory some days. But none of them really wants to screw an old fossil like me, so I’m safe.’ Gary looked wry. ‘You, on the hand, would soon become an endangered species. Want to try it?’

Lukas said casually, ‘Nah, it sounds like too much hassle to me. I can see what you mean.’ *Yes please, God. Please, please... just for a few days. A week at the most.* ‘Otherwise you’re here on your own?’

‘Wife number three packed her bags when the girls moved in, but it was just an excuse. The last straw.’

‘No boyfriends around—for them, I mean?’

Gary grunted and pulled a face. ‘It was like beating back a pack of wild dogs for a while. Randy bastards jumping the wall in the middle of the night, trying to climb in through the windows. I’m not having that and I’ve had to punch one or two on the nose to get rid of them. We’re here to work on the music and I laid down the law, told the girls it was boys or the band, take your pick. They’ll have plenty of time for screwing around when the album’s finished and they’re on the road. The girls got the message, but I still see a few love-struck idiots lurking about in the distance with their pants around their ankles. They know not to get too close.’

‘Maybe you need a big dog?’

‘I told you, she left when the girls arrived. Hey, are we finished? I’ve really got a lot to do.’

‘I guess so, unless something else comes up.’

‘Shit, no one really thinks that Bill was killed, do they?’

‘It’s possible. I’ve still got contacts in the police and I might be able to find out more. In the meantime, you might want to watch your back.’

Gary rolled his eyes. ‘If someone wants to stab me in the back, the queue starts at the door.’

Lukas gave him a business card and explained he might need to come back. Walking across the back patio Lukas heard the girls splashing in the pool and calling out goodbye to him in what he was certain was a disappointed way. He

waved and saw that three of them were topless now—and possibly bottomless under the water, too.

*Keep moving, just put one foot in front of the other, don't stop. It's not worth it. You don't want to get involved. It would only be gratuitous, meaningless group sex.*

By the time he reached his car Lukas had convinced himself that romping with five naked young women in a swimming pool was a terrible idea. It could be unhygienic for a start, if nobody wore any clothes. Dangerous in the sunshine, too. Besides, what could they talk about? They were a little more than half his age.

A dreadful idea.

For a few moments Lukas allowed himself to gently bash his forehead on the steering wheel. It didn't help.

**END SAMPLE**

# Back Page Stuff.

If you enjoyed *A Killer Groove* you might be glad to know it's just one of a series of Lukas Boston novels, plus a growing collection of paranormal novels and tales that you'll find on my website at [www.graemehague.com.au](http://www.graemehague.com.au) and for most there are audiobook versions available as well. If you're the kind of reader who creates reviews, and you have a few moments spare, posting a brief and honest review of this book on my website will be of tremendous help to myself and to others too. Of course, if you *didn't* like this book, I'd like to know that as well. Feedback from readers is important and I'll appreciate all comments and suggestions for making my books better.

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## **Serious Stuff...**

**A Killer Groove**

**by G.M.HAGUE**

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