

**ESCAPEMENT**  
**RENE GUTTERIDGE**





**WHEN YOU MURDER SOMEONE** and want to get away with it, there are some things you should remember. Let me say ahead of time that I am not certain I'm going to need to get away with it. But if I did, here's what I'd remember to do.

First of all, grab the wallet. Always grab the wallet. People have scrubbed down entire houses with bleach and vacuumed many a trunk, only to forget the wallet or purse, keys, and cell phone. (Take the battery out of the cell phone first.) Even if you don't scrub down the house, you still want to go ahead and take these things because when the victim's personal property is missing, it always adds another element to the investigation. If none of those things are missing, then detectives assume it was some kind of revenge killing or a crime of passion or some such. If they are missing, then they've absolutely got to throw robbery, kidnapping, or carjacking into the mix.

One poor fool murdered his girlfriend because he couldn't bear to just break up with her like the rest of the world does it. The guy goes through the entire house scrubbing it like it's got a communicable disease, vacuums, even uses air freshener. He wraps the body

in a rug, puts it in the trunk, drives twenty-five miles outside the city limits, dumps the body, comes back and parks the car, wipes it clean, and leaves.

But he forgets the wallet, keys, and cell phone.

She would've never left the house without those things. So naturally, she never left the house alive.

Then they go in, find tiny traces of blood (you have to know that you're not going to be able to mop up all the blood), and the next thing he knows, he's being interrogated.

That leads to point number two: If it gets to the interrogation, and it probably will, you've got to get yourself together. And by together, I mean fall completely apart.

Detectives are smart, and they study a lot of human behavior. So if you're brought in and asked questions about a murder, let your hands shake a little. That's nerve-racking stuff, man. I mean, innocent or not, if you've got two burly detectives asking where you were on Tuesday night at ten, it's going to rattle you. So if you're all spa-calm, it's going to raise a red flag. Also, you need to ask some questions. "What happened?" "Where did this happen?" "When do you think she went missing?" "Were there signs that something bad happened?" See what I'm talking about? If you want to act innocent, then you better start sounding innocent too. Innocent people know nothing about what happened, so they ask a lot of questions. And if you're really, really innocent, you're less concerned for yourself and more for whoever is six feet under.

If you were close to the person but recently broke up . . . whatever leads police to think you might have had something to do with it . . . you better get your distraught on. If your ex was murdered, that's going to wig you out, you know? Broken up or not. So for crying out loud, act the part.

Look, you have to be the picture of innocence, and sometimes innocence looks real messy.

These thoughts were going through my mind on a hot Wednesday in July. I had stopped to take a rest before the second crosswalk that led into the airport. I'd found the only patch of shade within ten feet and staked my ground. A little old lady with a walker looked my way, her beady blue eyes widening as she observed my shade, but I cast her a glare that told her to move on by.

Within ten minutes, I was pretty sure I could make it, so I kept walking. A taxi honked, probably because I was moving slow. I threw out some words that would get me fined by the FCC if I were a Super Bowl halftime show and kept walking. The truth was that I'd like to see him take me on. I bet I'd leave his bumper with a good dent.

Once across the street, I stopped and stared down the rotating door. Who came up with this nonsensical way to enter a building, I don't know, but it terrified me as a child and it still does. I mean, who doesn't have a memory of a parent grabbing your arm and yanking you in like your life depended on it? Then you're standing there awkwardly, all six of you shuffling your feet and trying not to touch the four people you don't know.

It was now awkward for a whole other reason, and I didn't have to worry about being with five other people I didn't know.

The large sliding door was only twenty feet down the sidewalk, but my knees were killing me. Had to go for it, I decided. You get stuck in one of those rotating doors once and trust me, you'd walk the twenty feet too.

Inside, the air-conditioning hit me like a back draft. So I stood under the large, loud fan, blocking traffic but not really caring. I was starting to get the belly button ring.

The only thing that got me moving again was that I noticed there was no line at the ticket counter.

"Misty" greeted me with the tight smile I was accustomed to.

“Hi, Misty,” I said with the overly eager, please-like-me smile I was accustomed to. “I’d like to book a flight to Wichita.”

“Okay,” she said pleasantly, her fingers gliding across the keyboard like there might be a recital and sheet music involved. “Looks like we have one departing in thirty-five minutes.”

“Yes!” I said, my tone fist-pumping my enthusiasm. “That is perfect. I’m on a tight schedule.”

“All right. I just need to see your ID and a credit card.”

I don’t have an actual *credit card* credit card. But I have a debit card that acts like a credit card when I need it to, except I can’t spend over what I have in the account. Long story that includes my low credit score and a porcelain donkey, but I can fill you in on that later.

I slid both cards across the counter.

Then her sparkly eyes fixed intently on me, so intently that I thought she was about to make a pass at me. But I knew better.

“Mr. . . . Big . . . Ham?”

“Bigham. One word. Soft on the *ham*, you see? Almost like *um* and not so much like pork.”

“I’m sorry. Of course.” She lowered her voice, but nobody else was in line. “I need to inform you that you’re going to have to buy two seats.”

“No. No, no. That’s not fair. Four years ago I was topping 480 and I got to Milwaukee just fine, seat belt extender and all. I’m way under that right now, like by fifty.” Okay, I fudged by fifty pounds.

“I’m sorry, but—”

“Listen, I know I’m screaming *wide load* here, but when I sit, it kind of all smooshes together and goes forward. I won’t lie to you—there’s no way I’m getting the tray down, but I can live with that. And I just thread my fingers together over my belly and I swear I don’t even touch elbows with whoever is next to me.”

“Sir, please. I’m sorry. It’s policy.”

I leaned on the counter. “Curious. How do you determine it? Do

you eyeball me, do a quick glance and picture me in a seat, or is there training on how to spot the one that won't fit? Should I hop up here where you weigh the luggage or what?"

Then, as sudden as a heart attack, tears squirted down her cheeks and she just stared at me like I should offer her some kind of mercy. And I'm a sucker for tears. Can't stand to see any woman cry. It breaks my heart every time.

Besides, I thought as I tried to offer her the handkerchief I knew was in my pocket but couldn't quite get to, what in the world did I have to lose here? I mean, I could buy two, couldn't I? Why not, right? Give me some elbow room at least. It'd be like flying first class.

But could I afford it? I had just over nine hundred dollars in the bank.

I waved my hands at her. "Look, sorry. I'm sorry. Don't cry, please."

She sniffled. "I'm so sorry. I just want to hug you and tell you how great you are. I can see it in your eyes. You'd totally win *The Biggest Loser*."

"I think I'm actually too heavy for it, but there are other shows to be had. For right now, I need to get from Oklahoma City to Wichita. I'll take two seats."

Relief caused every feature in her face to drop a good inch. "Thank you. God bless you, sir."

"No problem. Now, what's it going to cost me?" I didn't want to buy a one-way ticket. That sets off all kinds of alarm bells with security, and I know they'd be thinking I have a lot of places to hide a bomb. Can you seriously picture them with the wand and the plastic gloves, trying to figure out how to not miss anything?

"Looks like it'll be \$711."

Doable. Would leave me a couple hundred for food and supplies. "Okay."

“Per seat. So \$1,422.” Her eyebrows rose as she looked at me. “Something wrong?”

“I don’t have that much.”

Misty and I stared at each other for a moment. She was on the verge of tears again. I was on the verge of a nasty FCC fine.

“Listen,” she said. “What would you think about driving?”

“I don’t have my car. I took a cab here.”

“You could always rent a car.”

I blinked. Driving wasn’t my thing. But . . .

“If you fly, you won’t even get to Wichita until seven o’clock tonight, and you said you were on a time crunch. You could be there in two and half hours if you drove.”

“Seven? How is that possible?”

“There’s no direct flight. They take you to Dallas, then back up to Wichita.”

“That’s ludicrous.” I only had a few hours. I checked my watch. Just under six, actually.

“My thoughts exactly. But—” she glanced at a fellow ticket agent who’d stepped up to another computer—“it’s my break time. I could walk you down there and help you find something.”

“You’d do that?”

“Of course, Mr. Bigham.” She pronounced it like a pro.

We rode the escalators down together and soon enough I was at the rental car counter.

Misty turned to me before we stepped up. “You’ve got to splurge and get the Hummer.”

“Yeah?”

“I drove one once. It’s dreamy.”

“And roomy.”

She smiled at me. No, grinned. You know, if everyone was like Misty, I wouldn’t have to make this trip to Wichita.

I shook her hand. “Misty, lovely meeting you.”

**RENE GUTTERIDGE**

“You too, Mr. Bigham. Best of luck.”

I winked at her as she sauntered off, but I wasn't going to be the one who needed luck.