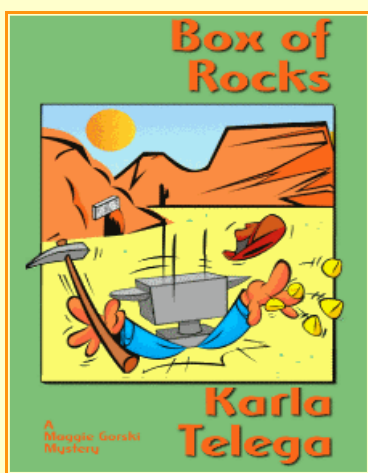




Excerpt from:
BOX OF ROCKS
 (A Maggie Gorski Mystery)
 by Karla Telega

See the book at: adorobooks.com



Ted strolled into the kitchen in a t-shirt and pajama bottoms, looking way too chipper for present company. He snagged a muffin and poured a cup of coffee. “What are you girls up to today, and should I notify the authorities?”

“I’m planning to starch all your shorts before lunchtime,” Maggie grumbled, adding, “Bwa-ha-ha!” “I think that was specifically addressed in our marriage vows.”

Cher looked over the list they had made. “Our first hobby is paranormal investigations,” she mused. “Does that mean we have to stay up all night staking out some graveyard?”

Maggie grunted and propped her head up with one hand. She turned a bleary gaze up to Ted. “If we don’t come out alive, there’s a pot pie in the freezer.”



“So tell me again why we’re doing this,” Maggie asked.

“It’s the gold fever they talk about, like in *Treasure of the Sierra Madre*.”

“I think you actually have to find gold before you get gold fever.”

Cher removed one rubber glove and massaged the back of her neck. “Give it time, we’ll be at each others’ throats soon enough.”

“I don’t think I brought ibuprofen. Is vodka considered a suitable analgesic?”

Just then, Fluffy spotted a tempting looking stick in the water next to Maggie. Fluffy had a number of vices, the worst of which involved eating poop. Not far down the list was his addiction to sticks. He especially loved the rotten, crumbling variety. This one was muddy with slimy grass streamers tangled around the end. Fluffy had the classic Rottweiler build: barrel-chested and solid. He was not light on his feet. Maggie presented an inconsequential obstacle between him and his prize.

“Oof!”

Her unlady-like grunt was cut short by a mouth-full of muddy water as she hurtled head first into the ditch. Cher hurried to her side to help lift her up. Maggie’s hair was dripping around her face, and the front of her sweatshirt was streaked with grass stains from the bank.



The victim was wearing only thermal underwear. When he finally reached the top, he was flopped over like a rag doll, and his long johns had snagged on several rocks and a protruding tree root, dragging the underwear to pool around his knees. He emerged from the pit with his backside exposed to the sky in an impressive full moon.



Bear limped back to his truck, still parked down the street from the building. Could he call it, or what? The rungs on the fire escape had long ago rusted through, and his weight was more than the weakened steel could bear. The drop wasn’t far, but he had landed awkwardly in a pile of plastic bags, which split open upon impact. He had the wind knocked out of him, and as he was finally able to suck in air, he realized how rancid it was. He counted at least four rats the size of terriers, and one of those refused to run away. It was unnerving to see the creature’s black button eyes latched onto him, unflinching in the dark. He had felt something squirming under his hands, and shuddered at the thought of maggots making their way into his pants.

As he emerged from the alley into the street lights, he looked down at his pants.

Great! There was a rip that went from knee to thigh, then continued up through his leather jacket. Apparently, his clothes had caught on a sharp edge of the broken ladder rung. There wasn’t any blood on his leg, but he gave a shudder at the proximity of the tear to his manhood.

He hobbled around to the front of the building, and was alarmed to see one police car after another pulling up all along the street. Worse yet, a news van double parked next to his truck. As he backpedaled, ducking around the corner, he nearly bumped into a young couple, hurrying over to see what was going on. They grimaced, and veered off across the street, giving him a wide berth. He could hardly blame them.

The perfect crime. At least nobody had seen him enter the building, and they tried to politely avoid him as he left. As long as they didn’t photograph his truck, he wasn’t going to need an alibi for this fiasco.

He smelled like rotting cabbage, his ankle was killing him, and he was pretty sure that there was a piece of gum stuck in his hair. God only knew how long he would have to wait there before the news crew left. A woman walking by paused before him, pulled a dollar out of her purse and pressed it into his hand.

“God bless you, honey.”



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