

*A CEO is murdered, will Mr. Krumnow, private investigator, be able to solve his crime, even when no one else seems interested in bringing the monster to justice? As the details unfold, will he be able to finish the job, and bring the murderer to the justice of the CEO's widow?*

# **CRICKETS**

By DONALD G. WEBB

Order the complete book from the publisher [Booklocker.com](https://www.booklocker.com)

<https://www.booklocker.com/p/books/10215.html?s=pdf>

**or from your favorite neighborhood  
or online bookstore.**

# CRICKETS

DONALD G. WEBB



Copyright © 2018 DONALD G. WEBB

ISBN: 978-1-60145-825-4

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., St. Petersburg, Florida.

Printed on acid-free paper.

The characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the author.

BookLocker.com, Inc.  
2018

First Edition

**CRICKETS**  
**DON WEBB**

I didn't hear her come in. Sophie was out, and I was alone in my office with a double-decker bologna sandwich, a jar of Polski Wyrobi pickles, and a cold beer.

"Are you E. Krumnow?"

"At your service, madam," I managed to say. "Care to join me for lunch?"

"No thanks, though it looks and smells delicious. Is the E for Edward or Edgar?"

"Neither, I'm afraid. The E is for Elvis. I use the E because I don't look much like an Elvis. I look like an overweight Polish detective, which I am, and an ex-cop, which I also am. That's enough about me. What can I do for you?"

"I'm . . . I almost said I'm Mrs. Langford. Anyway, I'm Patricia Langford, recently widowed. I suppose I'm still a Mrs."

"Forgive my lack of manners, Mrs. Langford. Have a seat, please." I pulled the chair out for her. She settled into it gracefully. She appeared to be around thirty, blonde, blue-eyed, and sad.

"My husband . . . I'm sorry, wait a moment."

She'd choked up, tears running down her cheeks. Grieving widows always get to me; I felt a lump in my throat. She said she was recently widowed, and I felt for her. I got her a glass of water from the cooler, asking if she'd like an aspirin or anything.

"No thanks, I'll be all right now. It has been only a week since . . . it happened."

"Of course. I understand, Mrs. Langford. You have my heartfelt sympathy."

"My husband was murdered, Mr. Krumnow. Horribly, brutally murdered. I need your help. Your simple listing under private investigators caught my eye. E. Krumnow sounds to the point and businesslike."

“That’s how I endeavor to run my business and it has worked out well so far. Did you come to me because of a contested will, something of that nature?”

“No, Thornton’s affairs were in good order. I don’t have any financial worries. He was very efficient, everything neat and organized. I came to ask you to help me find his killer, Mr. Krumnow.”

“I’m honored you chose me, but I’m sure the police are working hard to find your husband’s . . . to find the perpetrator. As a private investigator, I do divorce work, missing persons, and things like that. Surely you have confidence in New York’s finest.”

“That’s just the point. I don’t. At first I did, but now they just put me off when I talk to them. They don’t have a clue, though they pretend to. They say it’s just a matter of time; they’ll nail the killer soon.”

“I see. I don’t want to sound as if I’m giving you the runaround, but didn’t you say it has been only a week? Perhaps they will catch the person soon. I’d like to have your business, catch the guilty party myself. However, it could run into quite an expense for you.”

“You’re right . . . it . . . it’s . . . been . . . only a week, but a long, miserable week for me. As I told you, I have no financial worries or problems. Thornton Langford III was a wealthy man, Mr. Krumnow. I’m a wealthy woman. He was owner and CEO of the Langford Group, a world-renowned brokerage firm. His father was CEO before him. My son will head the firm in a few years.”

I remembered the case after she mentioned the brokerage firm. Langford’s murder was all over the news for a day or so, and then it tapered off, typical for New York. There’s always newer news in the big apple. Not to make light of the loss of human life, but murders happen far too often in metropolises like New York. My fifteen years in homicide were a constant reminder of the fact.

“Surely you read about it in the paper or saw it on television, Mr. Krumnow.”

“I did, of course. I read the entire article in the paper and watched the television news about it. I’m trying now to remember the specifics about the case.”

“I suppose murder is a common occurrence in our fair city; but my husband’s murder was devastating to me, and to my children.”

“Certainly it was. I wasn’t making light of it; I assure you.”

“Perhaps you’ll find this specific.”

She plucked a large envelope from her handbag, dropped it on my desk. I had no idea what was in the envelope. I didn’t ask. The lady was upset enough and my big mouth had already made things worse for her. I pulled out two-eight-by-ten color photos. The top one showed a wig on a polystyrene plastic head. Nothing strange about that, but the next photo got my attention. I gasped loudly. It showed the head and face of the man whence the hair came. The first picture was not of a wig. Taking a closer look, I saw his eyes looked strange. Although the picture was good, and in color, I couldn’t tell what was wrong with the eyes. They were black. On a sheet of copier paper was, “How do you like him now, Mrs. Langford? He won’t have any more bad hair days, will he?”

“I’m so sorry. I just don’t know what to say to you. The monster responsible for this doesn’t deserve to live. This is an injustice to mankind. It’s unholy! Where did you get these photos?”

“Federal Express delivered them to my front door. My eight-year-old son signed for them. Then he looked at them.”

“Oh, my God.” I expected her to break down, but she didn’t. I almost did myself, thinking about that innocent child viewing his dead, scalped father’s head.

“I’m afraid God won’t help us, Mr. Krumnow. It’s up to you and me, if you’ll help me. If you refuse, I won’t hold it against you. I’ll find someone else. My son is in the hospital under a doctor’s care, several doctors, in fact.”

“What did the police say about these photos?”

“The police haven’t seen the pictures, nor will they see them.”

“They haven’t . . . why not? They could run them through the crime lab, do all sorts of tests. It’s possible they could trace them to the killer. You could probably watch them stick the needle in him, the whole nine yards. I’d sit right beside you, if you’d let me.”

“What I want is to find him. Forget the police and the needle! They won’t find him anyway. Would you like to know why they won’t find

him? I'll tell you, whether you want to hear it or not. Since September 11 happened, over a year ago, everything else seems minor to them. What's one little murder in the wake of such a horrendous loss of human life?"

"Mrs. Langford, surely you don't believe that. I was a New York City police officer for twenty years. For the most part, the police are fine people, dedicated to serving and protecting the people."

"Mr. Krumnow, the police think terrorists killed my husband. This is all anyone has on his or her mind since September 11. But let me tell you; I know how those people's families feel now. I feel the same pain and sorrow. If the authorities can't find those responsible for thousands of innocent people's deaths, how do you expect them to find my husband's killer?"

"All right, then, in all fairness, if the authorities can't find the killer, what makes you think I can find him?" This lady was showing her mettle. I hadn't expected her to turn tiger. Just moments ago, she was a weak, grief-stricken female.

"I expect you to find him because I'll make it worth your while, for one reason. For another, I have the utmost faith in you. You're very good at what you do."

"Oh, you checked up on me, eh?"

"Of course I checked up on you. I'll pay your regular rate plus a million dollars for finding my husband's killer. Your regular rate will be paid for the duration of your search, then the bonus. There is no time limit. I want the monster dead, now or later; but I want him dead."

"You don't have to pay me so much. I'd do it for almost nothing. I want to see the freak get the needle. Will your son be all right? I mean, I certainly hope so."

"Doctor Cheney says the outlook is good. He expects Thornton to begin his recovery soon. However, the long-range prognosis isn't so good. He'll never be able to overcome it entirely, nor will I. The memory will always be there, for him and for me."

"I'll do it. However, as I said, you don't have to pay so much. Ordinarily, private detectives don't make that kind of money."

## CRICKETS

“You’re not ordinary, Mr. Krumnow. If you were, I wouldn’t be here. As for the money, I’ve committed to paying you a million dollars, plus your usual rate. My husband kept his commitments; I keep mine. He’ll be proud of me.”

Her lip trembled. I thought she’d lose control, but she didn’t. Her lip steadied and she was in better control than I was. I was in a daze; this lady was something else. I wasn’t awed by the million dollars. I don’t need that kind of money. I already have a good nest egg, and you can’t take it with you. But a million dollars does have a nice ring to it.

“I’ll have Sophie draw up a standard contract this afternoon. You’ll have a copy in the morning. Is there anything else we need to discuss?”

“Yes, there’s one other little thing. Like I said before, forget the needle. Your job is to find the monster and lead me to him. The authorities are absolutely not to know when this is accomplished. If this stipulation is unsatisfactory, consider the contract null and void as of now. Your mouth is open, Mr. Krumnow. Here is my address and telephone number; the check is your retainer.”

Then, she was gone . . . just like that. She was right; my mouth was open. I shut it and looked at the check. It was for ten thousand dollars.

\*\*\*

When Sophie finished typing the contract, I had to promise her a raise, which was only fair, I guess. After all, a million bucks is a tidy sum. I’d be able to afford a raise for Sophie. Then, Sophie decided, since my bonus was to be a million bucks, she should also get a bonus, which I agreed to. Her bonus is contingent upon my finding the murderer, of course, as is mine. She’s just full of ideas about spending the money we don’t have yet. Her next brilliant suggestion was we should move our office to a better neighborhood. With a plush office, say, anywhere north of our present location, I could charge higher rates and make big money.

I sighed and explained to her if I got a million bucks for this job, I wouldn’t need to charge higher rates; I could retire. This rash statement led to her retirement plan. At present, she doesn’t have one.



This could go on forever, so I got out of there and went out for a cup of coffee.

My office is at the lower tip of Manhattan, in Battery Park City, built on a landfill. Yeah, I said on a landfill. The idea was great, actually. Built near the tip of Manhattan Island, it was constructed during the 1980s. Battery Park City provided space for numerous office buildings and enough residences for some twenty-five thousand people. By no means elaborate, my office isn't exactly a dump, either. Whatever, it suits me and I'm not moving. Since the construction of Battery Park City, several more phases of landfill and construction have been added to Manhattan's land area. You'd never know all the office buildings and residences are resting on landfills.

It's time to call in some markers. I need to get started on the Langford case. I want to catch the evil one more than I want the money, or just as much, anyway. There are numerous Irish policemen in New York City, the majority arrogant and hardheaded. I got along well with most of them when I was on the force. Not many Poles were in the department, so I was always outnumbered. I had to get along with the Irish. Murphy was my partner for a long time, so I called him. He was in Staten Island, and since Langford was killed there, Murphy will be able to fill me in on the details, if I can get him to. Not wanting to offend my client, I hadn't told her I knew next to nothing about her husband's murder. I read about it in the paper and it came up on television a few times, but I hadn't paid much attention to it. After all, I'd never heard of Thornton Langford III until he was no longer among the living.

\*\*\*

Murphy was in fine form, as usual, extolling the superior qualities of the Irish, and reminding me I was just a dumb Polack. We were in Murphy's favorite greasy spoon drinking coffee laced with tots of bourbon. I'd known him for over twenty years and never knew him to be without his whiskey flask. But he's a good cop, for an Irishman.

"Damn, Elvis, where you been anyway? It was all over the newspapers and television for three or four days. You keep sticking your head in the sand, somebody's gonna shoot you in your big ass."

## CRICKETS

“I know, Murph, I know. You told me over twenty years ago. I still have my big ass and it still has only one hole in it. You still carrying those little lead pills in yours? At least I never tried to sneak up on a carload of dope-dealing Dagos, in the daytime, for Christ’s sake. Now, what were you about to tell me about the Langford guy?”

“Oh, he was one of those stockbroker types, big shot, he was. Got-- had a big mansion right here on the island. I think he was president of some outfit, richer than four foot up a cow’s ass, they say.”

“Bull’s ass, not cow. Ain’t you ever been out west? Never mind, I know he was rich. He was CEO of the Langford Group, a family-owned firm.”

“If you know so much about him, why’d you come here and bother me? Hell, I got work to do. Weirdest thing I ever saw, Elvis. Somebody just took his whole scalp off. It was a real neat job, too. Looked like they did it with a scalpel, like surgeons use. They didn’t take just the top part. They cut neatly around his ears and as far as the hair grew on the back of his neck.”

“Who found the body?”

“A guy who worked for him at the office found him. When he went into the parking garage, he walked past the back of Langford’s Lincoln and saw him sitting in it. This guy had worked late and knew the boss left around four o’clock. He thought it was strange Langford was just sitting there. Said he went on and was about to get in his car when he decided to see if anything was wrong. Something was wrong, all right.”

“Was he shot or what?”

“No, his throat was cut--ear-to-ear, a real neat cut, just like the scalping job. Me and Clancy were first to arrive on the scene. I almost crapped when I saw what they did to the poor guy. We couldn’t touch anything until after the fingerprint crew did their thing, but we knew at first glance he was dead. The weirdest part was the crickets.”

“What crickets? You better lighten up on the booze, Murph. You’re hallucinating-- crickets?”

“You heard me, crickets. You know, black bugs?”

“I know what crickets are.”

“I wasn’t sure about that. Yep, he had two crickets on him, one on each eye.”

“I never heard of crickets crawling on a body before. Why did they do that?”

“They didn’t do that. Somebody put them there, one on each eye.”

“If he was sitting upright, the crickets would have fallen off.”

“They couldn’t fall off. Hell, they were stuck to his eyeballs with straight pins.”

“I guess I’ve heard them all now . . . two dead crickets stuck on a dead man’s eyes with straight pins.”

“I never said the crickets were dead. They were wriggling their little asses off--gave me the willies. They couldn’t get loose because the pins were stuck in Langford’s eyeballs. The pinheads were all the way against the crickets, almost. They had just enough slack to sort of walk sideways in circles, fluttering their wings--fascinating sight, but spooky.”

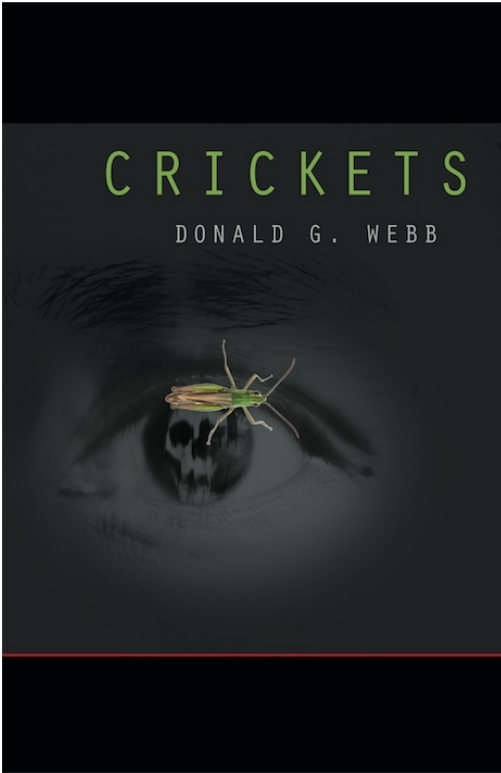
“I don’t remember seeing anything about crickets in the paper or on the news. In fact, they didn’t say what killed him, did they?”

“They didn’t say, and they don’t want it to get out. The captain made it clear to me, Clancy, and everyone who saw the body. You didn’t hear about it from me, okay?”

“My lips are sealed, Murphy. But why the cover up? I guess it’s to spare Langford’s family. It would be awful for his family to know about the grisly things the creep did to the body.” I didn’t want Murphy to know I’d seen pictures of the corpse. “You sure you can’t tell me anything more about it?”

“Damn right I’m sure. And you owe me for this, you know.”

I hope I don’t owe him much. He didn’t tell me much.



*A CEO is murdered, will Mr. Krumnow, private investigator, be able to solve his crime, even when no one else seems interested in bringing the monster to justice? As the details unfold, will he be able to finish the job, and bring the murderer to the justice of the CEO's widow?*

# **CRICKETS**

By DONALD G. WEBB

Order the complete book from the publisher [Booklocker.com](https://www.booklocker.com)

<https://www.booklocker.com/p/books/10215.html?s=pdf>

or from your favorite neighborhood  
or online bookstore.