

City Serenade is the sixth book in the Detective John Bowers police procedural featuring Portland, Oregon's Central Precinct. A serial rapist is on the loose in midtown and the Robbery-Homicide Unit catches a case they need to solve until the killer adds another victim to his list.

CITY SERENADE

by Ray Bates

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RAY BATES

**CITY
SERENADE**

DETECTIVE JOHN BOWERS
PORTLAND CENTRAL PRECINCT

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ONE

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It had quit raining, but the roof run-off dripped down his back. The gutter rushed in a torrent and soaked him as if he'd been in the Burnside car wash. No matter. Whenever it rained, he got wet. When the Columbia Gorge winds swept a misty curtain across the city, he shivered in the corners, pressed his runny nose against the urine-splattered bricks and wished himself inside where it was warm. The stinking swarm in the shelter reminded him he was still a notch up on the human scale from the flotsam of crazies and derelicts cursing private demons on the streets.

But he had come late this evening. He'd skulked under the bridge pier on Front Street to suck the last drops from a bottle of California Chablis some thoughtless yuppie had discarded in the parkway. Then he shuffled uptown and peed on an azalea bush while some crazy bum from the halfway house stumbled out of the shadows looking for someone to bash with a chunk of cement. And that made him late getting to the shelter. No bed tonight.

Just as well with all the wackos, pissers and bad-asses preying on broken-down losers like him, but he did miss the opportunity to shoot the shit with a pal so he could feel like a man for a little while. That was the only part he missed. That and bumping into Stella Longhorse, the Mojave Indian with tits hung to her bellybutton. He

liked her. She always shared her smokes and badgered him about when he'd eaten last, if he had any booze or if he wanted to knock off a piece for a buck. As if he ever had a buck. But he liked her.

"Hey, you ol' broken down sumbitch," she'd slur, spitting through the gummy smile. "You look like a man who gives a good goddam, Beans. Comere and gimme a light."

He always tried to have a match on him just in case he ran into Stella.

They called him Beans around the shelters and handout houses because when he sat down to a steaming bowl of navy bean soup or red-dog chili, he'd gulp down his ration like a garbage disposal. Leery diners at each elbow would guard their portions with the ferocity of prison wardens.

Beans gathered his jacket around his bony shoulders and watched a couple hurrying to catch a taxi. Stingy, spoiled sonsabitches. They walked right by a dozen times a day and never had the balls to look him in the eye. Invisible. That's what he was. A fucking nobody. Like a piece of garbage.

He shuffled into the alley and crouched behind an exhaust fan. Drawing both knees up under his chin, he poked his nose under his coat collar and hugged himself to ward off the paralyzing dampness that seeped through his clothes and chilled his blood. Cold as a goddam vampire, he hissed as he closed his eyes. If he could, he'd love to spread his arms, swoop out over the park benches, light on some goddam yuppie's neck and sink his fangs into a vein – suck the dampy-assed, cripple-minded fucker dry as an old maid schoolmarm. The fantasy whet his numbed brain as he drifted into a stupor behind the Chinese restaurant.

He woke up when he heard the man yell. He never heard the woman speak at all.

"Goddam!" he heard the man say as he tried to lift the woman off the ground.

"Ughhh!" was all she got out.

Her handbag dropped to the ground, and her shoes came off when the man put both arms around her in a bear hug and dragged her to the end of the alley. Then he drew his fists back and grunted like he

was taking a big shit. The woman slumped to the ground and lay there with her feet pointed east and west. As Beans rubbed his eyes, he watched the man fall on top of her and knew he was ripping off a free fuck.

He watched the man's hips humping in a steady rhythm that might have jump-started Beans' slack pecker if he hadn't sucked on the wine bottle all night. Staring in a blurry haze, Beans saw him draw back his right arm and punch the woman in the face. It sounded like a melon dropping from a second-floor window, a thunky squunch as his fist smashed into her nose. That didn't seem right, slugging her like that. Fucking her was one thing, but punching her face in was just like what some goddam pervert would do. And Beans wasn't going to let this smart sonuvabitch get away with it. Not on his back-alley turf.

"Hey!" Beans yelled in a voice hoarsened by booze and cold. "Knock that shit off!"

The man jumped to his feet, looked over his shoulder at where the bum was crouched but never saw him. Beans was practiced in the art of making himself invisible to street traffic, better at hiding out than a feral tomcat.

Beans could make out the bastard's face in the faint glow from the single security light at the restaurant's back door. He was clean-shaven with glasses and a puny, pansy-assed mouth. Fucking pervert. Looked like some fucking yuppie sicko.

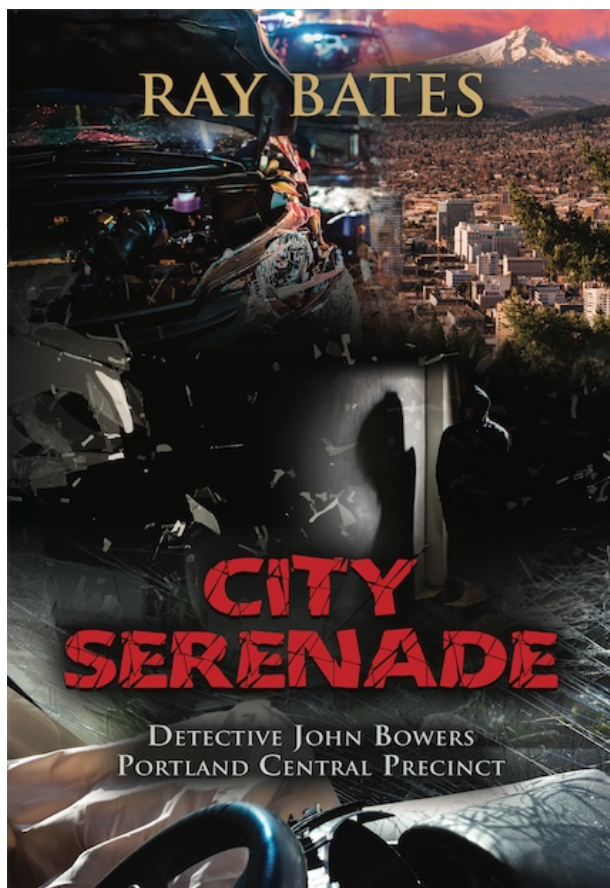
"Hey, you! Beat it!" Beans yelled again, emboldened by the frightened stare his interruption elicited.

The rapist pulled himself off the woman and sprinted to the end of the alley, banged his way past garbage cans and vaulted over a brick wall. Beans crept out of the shadows. He scooted over to the drainpipe, reached behind the Dumpster and picked up the woman's purse. He rifled through the contents which included a wallet, a lipstick, car keys and a tampon. He stooped for a half minute trying his damndest to focus on the disheveled carcass crumpled at his feet. Just made him dizzy. She was sucking air like an old bulldog. Her eyes opened and aimed right through him. Like he owed her

something. Never said a goddam word. Stupid bitch didn't know enough to get up and get gone.

Beans stepped over her, shuffled down the alley, crossed the street to Waterfront Park and stood beneath a lamp pole. He opened the purse, pulled out the wallet and counted thirty bucks. There was a driver's license, two credit cards that ought to be worth a buck or two and a Multnomah Falls post card. He shoved the bills and the cards in his pocket, tossed the purse in a garbage can and headed for Taylor Street and the Safeway grocery store. He couldn't buy any booze in Old Town – the result of a do-gooder ordinance to stop winos from feeding their habit in the downtown grid where they might puke or piss on a passing Rose City citizen. He'd have to go uptown to buy some wine before he could find a place to crash beneath the Stadium Overpass. Paradise, he thought as he bumped into commuters waiting for a bus. He could wrap himself in a warm, mute fog for days on this loot.

Beans skirted a farrago of misfits mingling on the brickwork at Pioneer Square and hurried up Broadway, past the crowd whose tinselled laughter echoed from the steel and glass canyons then evaporated like champagne fizz as he melted unseen into the night.



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