

Lieutenant Louis Veters, a retired Chicago Police Detective now working private, drawn into the murder of an aspiring young black artist, whose grandfather is a rich and powerful attorney, and the philandering of a neighbor's sizzling hot wife.

A MATTER OF CONSEQUENCES

By Michael W Falls

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A LOUIS VETTERS MYSTERY

CHICAGO

A

MATTER

OF

CONSEQUENCES



MICHAEL W FALLS

A NOVEL BY

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1

Reality TV sucks. So do those damn cold case stories in the news. “Entertainment for the unwashed,” quoting an old professor of mine. But I’m killing time before supper.

“On the evening of April 30th shortly after 10:00 P.M., Englewood native, Willis Sheldon walked from the Arts Building and his weekly class at Moraine Valley Community College, down a secluded path, veiled by thick bushes in full bloom, and young trees full of spring growth from recent rains.”

“From that peaceful cover, a solitary gunman emerged, a mere six feet behind Sheldon, and fired a .45 caliber bullet into the back of his head. Death came swift. The aspiring young artist probably never heard or saw his killer. He’d extinguished the life and future of Willis Sheldon, nineteen-year-old prodigy, in seconds.”

“Police claim they’ve run out of clues...”

On and on, bullshit. Typical cold-case article—no motive, no useful evidence, no footprints, cigarette butts, candy wrappers or garbage left behind. The bullet left its signature, but I’ll bet they find the gun that discharged it passed through so many hands that all track is gone—and, oh yeah, be sure to take a cheap shot at the cops.

Black kid, nineteen, from that background, single parent home, five will get you ten he’s a gangbanger, or drug dealer, I’ll bet both, a homie, a hood. Probably stepped over his turf—a snitch. Talking too much will punch your ticket. Article makes him sound like some underprivileged angel. Sentimental crap sells copy.

They’ll never clear this. People watch all those damn TV shows, they think all murders get solved. More bullshit. Not even half do, and

it's getting worse. Too damn many, and witnesses won't stand up. I ought to know—thirty years as a cop.

I tossed the newspaper and leaned back on the chaise. Close to supper and other than tending the lawn—hardly overwhelming duty in a yard full of bushes and flowers, today I hadn't accomplished a damn thing. I'm getting lazy. Half hour to supper—fish, not my favorite, but like she always says—if I don't like it, I can cook for myself. Doctor said I need to reduce my cholesterol she keeps reminding me. If he says so, and trans-fat—the buzzword for the times. Sounds to me like an airline for tubs.

I'd closed my eyes, drifting off, when Arnie Knutzen, my not terribly close neighbor, nudged me on the upper thigh. Struck me as a weird place for somebody other than my wife to touch and wake me up. For a second, a little electricity shot through my loins, till I saw who'd done it.

Arnie is a bricklayer, a mason—a real one, not one of those guys in that fraternity with secret handshakes and rituals, well I assume they have those since it's all a big secret. Anyway, he makes an honest living, and I guess a decent one because five years ago, he bought his own home across the street, and in this neighborhood, that takes some scratch, or foolish optimism. No college guy Arnie, so no debt, can afford to buy—irony in there somewhere.

Arnie's not a bad-looking guy, well, not handsome, I mean he looks like a bricklayer—big hands, thick limbs and trunk, not built for speed and not so inclined. I wouldn't call him stupid, but I don't find him intellectually challenging either, so I don't talk to him much. He's about forty, got a wife in her late twenties, vaguely Oriental or something, way better looking than he is, and what a build, from whatever direction you're staring- top to meaty bottom.

I have my suspicions about her, but I've never asked. No need to find out. She's the kind of gal a guy might catch in the movies—at a stag party. I'll make this observation—there ought to be a law that

they should never allow men like Arnie to marry women named Brandy. Why he did, well I suspect he had money when she didn't, spent it to make a splash, complemented her like crazy, and maybe he's terrific at one other thing that impressed her.

"Louis, you're not asleep, are you?"

Would I be the type to meditate? "No, no Arnie, just thinking things over." I wanted to engage in a brief conversation and get rid of him, but he wore a wounded look that promised otherwise. "You look troubled Arnie," I said, hoping I was misreading him because I didn't want to hear his troubles. And I was getting hungrier.

"Can I talk to you about something, Louis? It's sort of personal."

Oh God. "Well, you're here Arnie—why not?" He pulled out a cigarette, Camels, unfiltered, without asking me if I minded. Does he see an ashtray out here? Please blow that foul stench in another direction.

"I heard around the neighborhood that you do, uh, private work, investigating, I mean people ask you to do that, huh?"

Neighbors are talking about that over back fences? "Yeah Arnie, I have a PI license. I work for *hire*." That might dissuade him.

"Yeah... okay," he said.

I watched him bobbing his head back and forth, taking long, heavy drags on his cigarette, spitting out bits of tobacco between his lips, and picking them from his teeth. Was smoking worth the bother?

"So, if I paid you for investigating something for me... that would be how that would work?"

"Yeah, that's how that would work. But Arnie, what would you want me to investigate for you?" He took a deep breath before answering—several years from now they wouldn't come so easy. Of what was coming, I had a premonition.

“It’s Brandy, Louis. I think she’s seeing another man.”

Bull’s eye. “Arnie, what makes you think that? What do you really know?”

“For one thing, she’s been lying about places she’s going. A friend of mine, he wasn’t on a job that day, he saw her having lunch at this fancy restaurant on the north side, near downtown, with some young-looking guy with curly black hair. When I asked her about it that night, she told me about some guy she went to high school with and they just met to talk about old times.”

“Arnie, why do you suspect she’s lying?”

“Why wouldn’t she tell me about it before she went there? Or why didn’t she tell me about it afterwards? If I hadn’t asked her, she never would have told me. Louis, I waited, for hours. Even asked her what she did with her day, when I first came home, like I always do. You don’t forget going to a place like that.”

Like I said, he wasn’t stupid. “What else, Arnie?”

“One day, last week I had to cut a job real early because it was raining, and I got home at noon. Usually, I wouldn’t get home till 5:00 or 6:00. When I got home, no Brandy. She didn’t say about going anywhere, but I don’t keep her on a leash. Anyway, she doesn’t come home till after 4:00—all dressed up like she’s been to a party. I asked her what she’d been doing—she said she’d been shopping. Louis, all she had with her was a gallon of low-fat milk. Can you picture a woman going shopping all day and all she buys is a gallon of milk?”

He was starting to sound intelligent. “Okay, go on Arnie.”

“There’ve been calls to her cell a couple times in the evening. She walks out of the room and covers up who she’s talking to. When I asked who called she said one of the neighbors. She doesn’t have to hide a call from the neighbors. And speaking of neighbors, I talked to

one of them, you know—Mr. Freed, he’s retired, and he told me she’s left the house, all made up, twice, and stayed away all day.”

He paused and looked away, then lit another of those smelly fags, after grinding the first one out on my patio. I hoped he’d finished venting, and I would speak, when he cut me off with the grand finale.

“Louis, lately... she’s been... I’m not getting any attention, at all, you understand. I think she’s too tired, she’s... giving it away.”

Where did he hear an expression like that? Now I’m craving an early beer, just to kill some time, and dull my senses, but Al wouldn’t approve.

“Arnie, is there any possibility she’s working at a job somewhere and doesn’t want to tell you?”

He considered that for all of three seconds.

“Louis, can you imagine Brandy working at a job?”

Yeah, like I can see Martha Stewart scrubbing floors. “No, I guess not. But Arnie, the first thing you should do is talk to Brandy. Tell her, be honest and get the truth from her. She’s your wife Arnie, try a straight-forward approach.”

“Louis, how am I supposed to ask my wife—are you cheating on me?”

“I don’t know Arnie.”

“I’d rather find out first. I mean, what if I’m wrong? Accusing her would be even worse.”

Sooner or later, it would get a lot worse. Because he wasn’t wrong. But I never said that because I didn’t want to get involved. I had good reasons, not the least of which was what Arnie might do to some sorry ass when he found out he’s right. And my stomach started growling—even for fish.

“Arnie, I’d like to help you, but the problem is—I don’t like to get mixed up in an investigation when I’m acquainted with both parties personally. It’s not healthy. No one will end up happy.” Al poked her head out the back door—temporary reprieve.

“Louis, dinner is ready, don’t be late, we’ve got to eat fast.”

Why in hell did we have to eat fast? What had I forgotten? “Look Arnie, let me mull it over. I’ll call you in a day or two. Maybe I can recommend somebody that’ll do this for you, and they won’t be personally involved.” Only I didn’t know a soul who wouldn’t charge the poor schnook twice what it’s worth.

“Yeah sure, Louis, okay, only I don’t think I can talk about this to a perfect stranger, you know.”

How I’d love to be a perfect stranger.

He rose slowly, lumbering away, then turned back as he reached the gate. “Louis, I still love her. I... I want her back.”

I looked at that sad, puppy-dog face, and wondered, how the hell am I going to get shed of this mess.

Al whipped the plates, cutlery and cups onto the table with the dexterity of a Vegas poker dealer. Determined not to rush, I settled down and relaxed.

“What did Arnie want,” she asked, hurrying from the kitchen with steaming food and cold drink. I’m talking to a moving target.

“Oh, he has troubles,” I answered.

“Brandy?” she asked, plopping into her chair, staring at me.

What to reveal? What to withhold? I broke into a laugh. What did I need to?

“So, why are we rushing dinner?” I asked, examining the contents of my plate—cod, didn’t appear so unappetizing after all.

“I mentioned this afternoon,” said Al, plunging a fork into her fish.

“I probably didn’t listen,” I admitted, tasting mine, adding a squeeze of lemon, a shake of pepper, salt, and okay, I’d tolerate the fish.

“Daniel and Natalie are bringing Joseph and Jason over tonight, while they go to a movie.”

“Hmm, that’s great, only why can’t they take the boys to the movie?”

She gave me that “do you really need to ask,” look, and frowned, “It’s not Disney, definitely not Disney.”

“Oh, I see.”

“And they’re leaving them overnight,” she added, shoveling in some crisp, cottage fries. I guess I hadn’t listened to still more. She read my confused expression.

“Daniel has a very important interview, first thing in the morning, and Natalie has to work, of course, so we’ll babysit.”

“Don’t my grandsons still attend school?”

“Teacher’s Conference Day.” said Al, barely pausing from eating.

“Oh, those things. Had them in my school days. They’re just concessions the union won, so teachers get an extra day off.”

“You mean like your personal days?”

“Touche.”

“Did you also forget the lift assembly needs repaired in the upstairs bathtub? Or how about the Homeowner’s Association meeting tomorrow night? They’re counting on you to write the petition for that stop sign.”

Now she was rubbing a sore spot.

“Dammit, Al, they don’t need a sign there. I’ve told you before—never put up a stop sign in the middle of a block. It’s dangerous. It sets up an expectation that drivers will stop, and they...”

“Louis, can’t you forget you’re not a cop anymore? You’re retired. You’re a neighbor. Do you want to keep pissing them off?”

And so, I did forget, in my dreams.

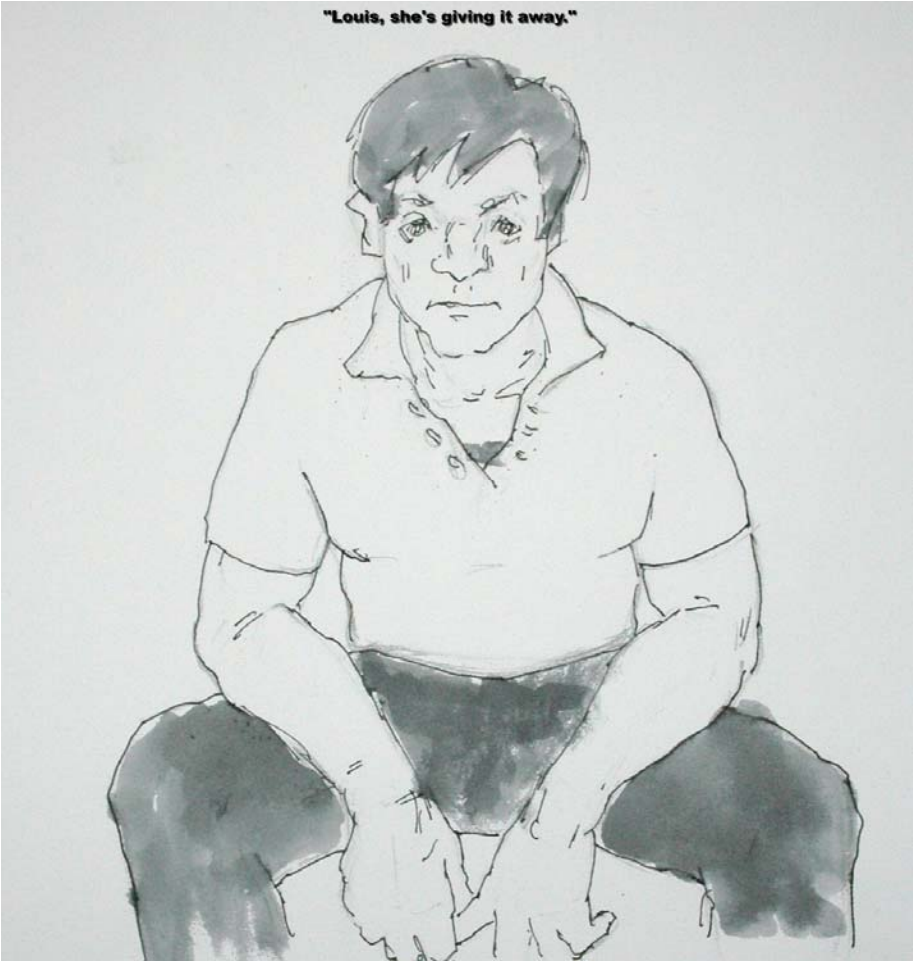
“Isn’t it enough they inflicted those damn speed bumps on us, all over the neighborhood? I nearly busted my front tooth on one yesterday. They don’t belong there either.”

She’s stopped responding. Stopped listening to my rants. Eyes down, forking her salad. Her signal—conversation over.

And so are the days of my life being filled by others, in particular—my wife, who’s certain she’s doing her bored, retired husband a big favor, spending each day all by himself while she takes off for work. Had only one means of escape—so, after retiring the boys for the night, before curling up with a good mystery in bed, I made a phone call.

“Hello Arnie, I mulled it over. I’ll do it.”

"Louis, she's giving it away."



2

You might not realize this but it's no simple task to snoop on your neighbor. As a cop, I performed countless hours of surveillance, driving to location, sitting in an unmarked, hidden from view.

Today I use my own vehicle and it's the same routine except I'm more careful with the car—I pay the damn insurance.

What to do when the person I'm watching lives a quarter-block down the street? I discovered a view of ninety percent of the front of the house, from the window in one of the upstairs bedrooms that had been Daniel's, while taking care of my two grandsons jumping up and down on the bed, not playing some board game I pulled from back of the closet. I forgot—nowadays its I-Pads, or is it I-Pods?

By the time I'd hustle to the garage, throw open the door, fire up the car, and back onto the street, Brandy might be out of sight. Looks like I'm stuck with my living room window, or the porch I never perch on. Hope I'll never be old enough to start that.

Early evening had arrived; I assumed Arnie and his better-half to be together, when a distinguished looking, middle-aged, black man, hiked up my walk, onto the porch, and rang my bell. Distinguished because he wore a well-tailored, three-piece, grey, pinstripe suit. Middle-aged because he appears approximately mine—nearing sixty, which means I'm still in my fifties, which I now define as middle-aged. Elderly I'll call sixty-five until I get there. Some young snot recently chided me that by forty we've already lived half our lives, so then begins middle-age. Up his.

I suspect this fellow approaching is important, because he isn't carrying a briefcase. If he carried a case at this time of day, he'd be a salesman, insurance or something, which would render him unimportant, and a legitimate target for my abuse. Nothing too nasty—

I just love tossing peddlers from my door. And for sure he didn't live in the neighborhood, because this is Chicago.

“Good evening. I am addressing Lieutenant Louis Veters, CPD, retired, am I not?”

He smiled as he spoke. Somebody had given him an accurate physical description. I'd love to know if they'd been flattering. I told him he had his man.

“My name is Ramsey Turner. I am an attorney, but...” and he held both hands up to stop me from saying what I was thinking “my visit has nothing to do with my occupation. People I know told me you've worked these last two years as a private investigator. They spoke quite highly of you. May I come in?”

That warranted a “why not,” and an unspoken “who in hell” gave him specific information about my time retired. Al worked in the kitchen and didn't venture out, while Capone took such an intense interest in shoes and cuffs, that I'm sure Turner owns a dog, though he glanced at mine rather peevishly. He didn't reach down to stroke him, so I dismissed the little guy who promptly scooted off in search of Al to score some treats.

“Have a seat Mr. Turner.” I directed him into Al's chair, which deterred her from joining us, a signal she'd perceive. I settled into mine as Turner looked about his surroundings.

“Your home is very warm, Lieutenant, so intimate, the abundance of fresh flowers, are you celebrating some special occasion, or are you a doting husband?”

Once a visitor had joked “who died?” Turner had tact.

“Well, no, well that is, not that I'm not, but the flowers are my wife's, she works as a floral designer, but, what about you, Mr. Turner? Are you a married man?” I'd noticed his ring, but today so many have cut the cord.

“Yes, I am. My wife, well, she is also very... occupied.”

In-other-words, she didn't have to work.

“You stoke my curiosity, Mr. Turner. You mention ‘people’ who told you about me. Sounds like you did some investigating of your own.”

He smiled and stared straight ahead.

“I am a very cautious man, Lieutenant, but you want to know who, well, I hope you will accept, I have perceptive, and trustworthy contacts within the law enforcement community. They led me to you.”

I had to accept. Turner had a clever way of complementing me, and telling me to mind my business, both at once.

“You also made a point of saying you're a lawyer, and then, it had nothing to do with your visit. That's a noteworthy approach, Mr. Turner.”

“We tend to define one another by our occupations, don't we—you, a policeman, I, an attorney.” His pace stayed measured, but with a certain, uh, gravitas, yes, that's the word, gravitas in his tone.

“We define ourselves by it, also,” I added.

“Yes, that's why I made mention. It may come to bear on our business relationship. However, I am a corporate lawyer—taxes, investments, mergers, acquisitions—no criminal law. I am the chief partner with Turner, Coleman and Byrd, in the Loop.”

He spoke that last phrase in the tone of a question and cast his eyes on me to suggest—I should know of them. I'd heard of the firm, though their area of expertise fell outside my orbit. I figured he meant me to impress me. But he was still a lawyer. I wouldn't concede.

“Oh, pardon my manners, Mr. Turner, would you like some coffee, or something stronger.”

“Coffee would be fine, if it’s not any trouble.”

“No trouble, already brewed, thirty years as a cop, I live on the stuff.” I was about to call out to Alice but that might involve her in the business unfolding, and I suspected my guest preferred not to socialize. So, I asked about accompaniments, excused myself, while attending to matters in the kitchen with the briefest of explanations.

“Now Mr. Turner, you referred to my services as a private investigator. How in that capacity can I help you?”

“Lieutenant, my concern is of a very personal nature. Some four months past, an unseen, unheard assassin murdered a young man named Willis Sheldon, who was walking from an evening class in a south suburban community college. Willis Sheldon was my grandson...my only grandson.”

He paused. He suffered hurt and anger from telling his tale but was a man in whom you only saw it smolder. He took a moment to gather himself, long enough for me to explain I knew of the crime, having read only yesterday about the cold case.

“Yes, it proved very difficult for me to read that article. Just one more death of a young black man on the south side. Who’s counting? Who would notice, except, of course, his family that cared about him and loved him? At any rate, I see you are apprised of the details.”

“What I’ve read, yes. Is there more?”

“No, there isn’t. That is the problem Lieutenant, over four months and there is nothing more. My grandson’s murder has become what you called it—a cold case. Cold—which implies shelved, moribund, no longer being investigated unless some further compelling evidence should surface.”

“I’m sure the police did everything possible, Mr. Turner.” I could predict where this conversation was going and making me

uncomfortable getting there. He smiled at me, his stare fixed and cool. I'd fed him a line he'd expected.

"I admire your loyalty, Lieutenant. Regardless, the police will not take extraordinary measures to solve my grandson's murder. They do not have the time or resources to concentrate on one more unimportant case, in-the-midst of all the carnage on those streets. Well, I've given the authorities their opportunity. I require the time and skills of one man, devoting himself full-time to the effort. From what I understand Lieutenant, you are that man."

My turn to answer had come. But I didn't, not right away, not for a while. Didn't say a damn thing, just drifted back in my chair, thinking. And he said nothing; just let me think. I guess he saw the wheels rolling. The biggest wheel being a retired cop interfering in a case still open. I'd encounter blockades. I remembered how I'd have felt while still active, if somebody pulled that stunt on me. But he was correct dead-on. The police devote only so many resources for so long to an individual case until they run out of anything more to investigate, or anyone to talk to, assuming they'd found anybody who would, and put it to the back of the shelf—not off the shelf, but definitely—to the back. Which didn't mean they'd be any happier about my sticking my nose in.

But that was my problem. I knew one that might be his. I had to bring it up, however uncomfortable.

"Mr. Turner, in my thirty years as a cop I got very used to watching the bereaved mothers of those young, dead black men standing before reporters swearing to the innocence of their sons, swearing they couldn't have possibly been involved in anything illegal, swearing the police overreacted. I'll be brutally honest with you, Mr. Turner. I assume you want me to be. Ninety-five percent of the time, or more, we found anything but that to be the case. I'm not telling you the police are perfect. I'm won't claim there are no racists in the force. That would be a lie. What I'm wondering is—are you going to be able to live with everything I uncover? Because you buy

my services, I'll be thorough and straightforward." And so, I stopped, and waited to gauge his reaction. The wait was short.

"Lieutenant, that is exactly what I expected you to say." I wasn't sure how to take that. "Let me assure you, whatever you find, I can live with. My grandson was not perfect, I'm not blind. He went through some difficult passages. I don't know all the details, but I'm positive he was righting himself. He had a promising future, and someone derailed it."

"Okay, fair enough. By the way, the article I read spoke of his mother. It said she has a daughter, as well, but I recall nothing about his father."

"He isn't worth recalling wherever the hell he is. He disappeared from the scene, some years ago. You find him, lose him, unless he has anything to do with all this, which I doubt. As for Willis' mother, my daughter, you will have her full cooperation. I will see to that."

I got a fleeting impression from the way he spoke, that would require some special effort, but I guessed I'd find out why. Didn't sound like he'd let that be my problem.

"One last question, Mr. Turner—a man of your standing, I imagine you have enemies, have you considered..."

"So, I have, Lieutenant, but my enemies would not reap revenge via my grandson, they'd come straight after me. And if it were otherwise, well, I'd have learned, by now."

Yeah, given the time that had lapsed, and apparently, he'd overturned those stones himself.

"Now lieutenant, though you haven't said so officially, I'm assuming you've decided to accept my offer?"

I smiled and nodded my agreement. He rose from the chair and handed me a card.

“Please send all necessary contracts, including terms and conditions, fees, retainers, to that address. You’ll find my responses always prompt,” he said. “And Lieutenant, note this—any assistance you require, any back-up, as you might call it, you have only to ask; I can provide whoever, whatever you need. Understand?”

I did, and wasn’t sure I wanted to.

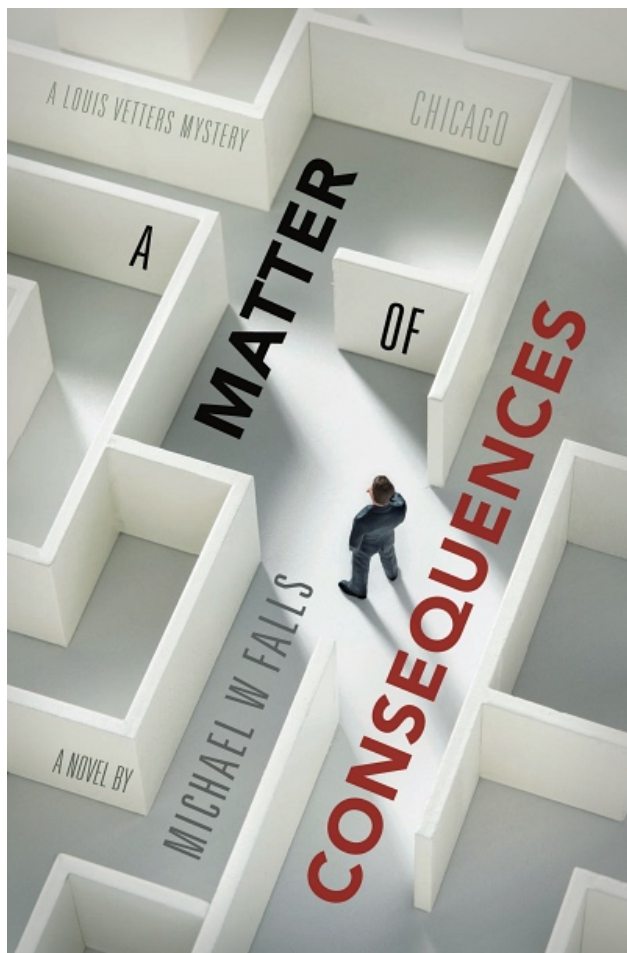
“I’ll drop my paper by your office tomorrow afternoon,” I replied. We exchanged “good evenings” and Turner left. Nothing more necessary. He’d pay whatever I charged, and quickly. Money would be no object. Oh baby, what a sweet phrase to my ears. I had a fascinating case to involve me full time, full bore.

And only then, I remembered Arnie.

BIOGRAPHY

I have lived in many places across the U.S., including obviously a considerable time around Chicago. My two primary careers had been as a public manager, then an actor, before becoming the writer my work and life were preparing me to be.

In early 2016 I released my first novel, “THE DEBT.” (available on Amazon)



Lieutenant Louis Veters, a retired Chicago Police Detective now working private, drawn into the murder of an aspiring young black artist, whose grandfather is a rich and powerful attorney, and the philandering of a neighbor's sizzling hot wife.

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