



★★★★★ **Spencer and Southby Sleuth Again** Sep 10 2012

By [Lou Allin](#) TOP 500 REVIEWER

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Margaret "Maggie" Spencer and her partner Nat Southby have a penchant for finding interesting cases for their detective agency in Sixties Vancouver. They are vacationing in romantic Victoria on the mainland when they encounter two sisters, one a recently bereaved widow, who ask them to look into an apparent suicide. Artist and gallery owner Jonathan Standish left behind a dubious, typewritten note. In only one inspection of the logistics of the shooting vs. an old injury of Jonathan's, Maggie and Nat jump into the case. What better reward than to see that his widow receives her due from the insurance that would result from a crime instead of suicide?

There is no shortage of suspects, the couple discovers, from the prickly gallery manager to many penurious artists, to the victim's rogue preacher living with his family in the outback. He's only too happy to spew vitriol about his stepmother, now in charge of the gallery. One obvious clue is the old picture of a woman and her daughter. They look like the subjects of Jonathan's own iconic ceramics. Someone is leaving flowers on the grave. Could a family secret be returning to wreak havoc?

For a couple on the outer edge of their "prime," Maggie, divorced from a wealthy lawyer, and Nat, a former lawman, have a modern partnership which extends to the bedroom and raises eyebrows. They're perfect compliments, one taking the cerebral and the other the corporeal as they match wits with each other and fend off the ever-present Inspector Farthing: "What are you sticking your nose into now, Southby?...I told you to keep out of police business."

As if Maggie didn't have enough to do, her daughter Midge is getting married, her other daughter is more pregnant than a duplex, and time is running out. As she and Nat pursue their own investigation with the medical examiner, the lawyer, the family, and the less than cooperative starving artists at the gallery studio shop, she wonders if she hasn't bit off more than she can chew.

A more innocent and younger Vancouver as well as the evocative scenes of Galiano Island and interior Mission, BC, form an attractive backdrop. Southin lives in Sechelt, so her heart is joined with this scenic part of Canada, and her convincing details contain the meticulousness of a long-time resident.

"They were halfway to Galiano Island when the rain began petering out and a light wind ruffled the small whitecaps that now glinted in the sun. Maggie, leaning over the ferry's rail, watched fascinated as masses of jellyfish, their

transparent bodies pulsing in and out, swam in the clear depths."

It's always a pleasure to ride along with Maggie and Nat as each adventure sweeps them into intrigue. The classic puzzles contain clues sprinkled with perfect timing and a thoroughly satisfying denouement. Secondary characters are drawn with precision and love, such as Henny, their Dutch girl Friday, who adds a touch of wry humour to the office. Pull up a comfortable chair and have a cuppa as they tackle their latest case.