

**Chocolate, Cookie, Pancake, etc.:**  
**A Fresh, New Recipe for Fear, Murder, and Detective Fiction**

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In the use-up-stray-ingredients economy that good caterers invariably subscribe to, I noted egg whites left over from making Babsie tarts, a couple of oranges that I'd ordered along with the lemons, and several unopened jars of poppy seeds. I pounced on these ingredients. I'd assemble a cake-like orange poppy-seed bread. Or die in the attempt.

As always, cooking lifted me from the doldrums. While the egg whites were whipped into a froth, I measured the dry ingredients and then delighted in the fine spray of citrus oil that slicked my fingers when I scraped the zest from the oranges. Outside, the sun shone brilliantly in a deep blue sky and a warm breeze swished through the aspens. I opened the window over the sink. The boys' music reverberated along the street. Out back Jake howled an accompaniment. I smiled. If the music made the boys happy, I wasn't going to say a thing.

I was folding the poppy seeds into the batter when John Richard Korman jumped in front of the window. I screamed and dropped the bowl in the sink. The bowl shattered. Jake howled. Locked out back, the dog couldn't help me. I'd disarmed the security system. I hadn't turned it back on. Oh, God.

Unthinking, I wheeled around wildly for the phone. But by then John Richard had pulled off the screen, reached through the window, and grabbed my wrist. (305, Diane Mott Davidson, *The Grilling Season*)

Thus, Goldy Bear-Schulz's perfectly happy moment, which Goldy works very hard to achieve against all odds, comes to a crashing end with the entrance of her ex-abusive-husband John Richard Korman. The JERK, a name Goldy and Marla (John Richard's other ex-wife) christen him with and use while referring to him in conversation (incidentally, a name that is inspired by John Richard's initials), enhances his sudden, violent entrance on to this scene of serenity with further viciousness. Twisting Goldy's wrist painfully, slapping Goldy hard, "yanking her hand over the window frame" (306, Diane Mott Davidson, *The Grilling Season*) resulting in a bleeding forearm, threatening her relentlessly (all of which comes very easily to him), John Richard Korman continues to "make his presence felt" until Goldy decides to protect herself from his abuse with the help of a "...heavy piece of ham..." (307, Diane Mott Davidson, *The Grilling Season*) lying "...on the counter" (307, Diane Mott Davidson, *The Grilling Season*). This move by Goldy, in the absence of

knives at hand, brings food which always remains the centre of Goldy's life into sharp focus. Its food to the rescue for this caterer turned sleuth.

Diane Mott Davidson is the creator of a popular culinary mystery series, revolving around an amateur detective named Goldy Bear-Schulz. The detective in this series Goldy Schulz, once Goldy Bear, is a caterer by profession. She runs a successful catering business called "*Goldilocks' Catering, Where Everything Is Just Right! (Sweet Revenge, 6).*"<sup>i</sup> It should be noted here, right away, that this success, both professional and personal, for Goldy is a very slow build and is hard earned; in fact, a fairly relaxed Goldy<sup>ii</sup>(both in her personal and professional life) only partially emerges by the thirteenth and the fourteenth books in the series.<sup>iii</sup>Goldy is initially seen trying to run her business all on her own, and later teams up with her loyal, and long-suffering, fellow-caterer-assistant Julian Teller. Along with Julian, her best friend Marla, her second husband and the love of her life Detective Tom Schulz, and her son Arch, Goldy keeps falling into sticky situations involving murder, mayhem and more and inevitably ends up solving (the) mysteries and catching the perpetrators of the crimes committed.

The series is exclusively set in a fictional town called Aspen Meadow in Colorado and we find Goldy dealing with bitter winters, complicated "falls"<sup>iv</sup>, snowfall, tricky winding roads, lakes and other water bodies, snowboarding areas precariously perched off awkward mountainous terrain, and many more of such geographical hurdles and impediments. These become issues of interest because the story winds itself around how Goldy and Julian have to deal with the above mentioned obstacles or snags, placed in their way both by geography and weather, while working their way around recipes, mounds and mounds of cutting, slicing, dicing, cooking, pre-prep for a do, getting the dishes just right, moving cutlery, and cooking utensils to their venues, cleaning up afterwards, looking out for more help when it comes to serving food at their parties and "dos", and so much more. Throw in an unplanned<sup>v</sup> murder at any one of Goldy's catering stints, and a few unaccounted-for bodies, and the recipe for this series of murder mysteries proves to be more than its share of mouth-watering adventurous— rich, delicious, and delectable.

As one reads Davidson's culinary series and gets to know Goldy better, it becomes apparent that this caterer is no stranger to fear. As seen earlier, dealing with an abusive ex-husband who stalks her life and continues to abuse her, even after her second marriage to a policeman (no less), is the reality and base of Goldy Bear's life. That fear defines everything that Goldy does, like getting trained on Med Wives 101, installing a high-end security system, carrying a gun, dealing with one crisis over another, and cooking. Every time fear rears its ugly head, Goldy starts cooking—either for a do she has signed up for or to try and come up with a new recipe which she can use in her next catering stint. Interestingly, the fear that is a part and parcel of Goldy's personality progressively changes form and shape with each book in the series. From getting a catering business going with slim chances of success, to having no money, from getting away from John Richard Korman one fine night son in tow, to alternately worrying about whether her son Arch will turn out to be like his father and/or cave into the undue pressure set by John Richard Korman, time and again, from dealing with complex father-son relationships to finding love and having to deal with a son-and-stepfather

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relationship on a daily basis, from friends to family to assistants, right back to friends and family again, from cranky, over demanding customers to those who leave everything to the caterer, from dead bodies to getting her business shut down time and again because of murder or attempted murder—this lead protagonist of the Davidson culinary series lends a whole new meaning and definition to fear. And the ready weapon she uses to fight fear, constantly, is her cooking. On an occasion when someone shoots at her house, for example, the following is Goldy’s train of thought:

Again, the gunshot echoed in my ears. I couldn’t stop trembling. Where were the cops? Why was it so cold in here?

I needed comfort. I was going to make *scones*.

I felt better immediately. (Davidson, 12, *Sticks and Scones*)

Another example may be seen in the very first book in the series *Catering to Nobody*, where Goldy’s business gets shut down when her ex-father-in-law, a guest at the wake Goldy is catering, gets poisoned. The investigating officer handling the case, Detective Tom Schulz, decides to visit Goldy for some routine questions and on entering her kitchen observes, “It sure smells good in here” (Davidson, 64). A little while later he says, “Just calm down...Let’s start over. You can begin by offering me a nice cup of espresso and some of those rolls they’re eating out in the kitchen. I don’t ordinarily take refreshment at a suspect’s house, but I am going to make a large exception, since it smells so good in here” (Davidson, 65).

Similarly, in *Double Shot*, Davidson’s twelfth book in the series, Goldy’s ex-husband John Richard Korman gets shot at and killed and Goldy, after being attacked and her food being sabotaged, gets framed for the murder. So, after her statements at the police station, she immediately gets to cooking the very next day. “I checked on the vanilla yogurt: It had drained and left behind a thick, smooth, custard-like mass. I whipped a mountain of cream, folded it into the yogurt, and set the soft mixture back in the refrigerator to chill. Then I trimmed and chopped peaches, nectarines, and strawberries to layer with the yogurt mixture in crystal parfait glasses when I arrived at the country club” (Davidson, 168, *Double Shot*).

Thus, any occasion that is structured around fear finds Goldy cooking to deal with her immediate fears. Throughout the series, one can map the specific areas where Goldy is most likely to start cooking for herself, family, friends, and neighbours, or preparing for a client/customer signed on. Temporary loss of *Goldilocks’ Catering*, financial crisis, dealing with John Richard Korman, emotional issues concerning Arch, Tom, Julian, Marla, and other characters dead or alive who are friends and neighbours, her past and its abusive patterns<sup>vi</sup>, and the discovery of a dead body—these are key areas of distress for Goldy which always sees her in her kitchen, or other locations where her job takes her, cooking away to glory.

It is important, interesting, and fascinating to note that there is one other fundamental area where Goldy’s cooking becomes significant in terms of a sign and representation of not only what the character stands for but what the genre<sup>viii</sup> in general is looking for in terms of a definition. Once

the bodies are discovered, once a crime is committed, the detection is what leads any reader to want to get to the end of the book. This is the underlying format, grid to any good detective novel. The “how” of the detective’s method, carves a unique niche for her/him in this genre. And it is in this detection that Goldy cooks the most. While solving a crime, piecing and gathering information learnt in random order, Goldy always moves towards a recipe and executes it (sometimes perfectly and sometimes not-so-perfectly). The process of the cooking is always interspersed with the execution of an ongoing recipe, which is *how* she solves mysteries surrounding crime. “I peeled the potatoes, dropped them in the water, and checked on the enchiladas, which had begun to bubble. Next, I nuked the chicken stock. After slicing a mountain of celery, I began chopping onions. And that was when I again saw the blood on the rock, the map floating downstream” (Davidson, *Sweet Revenge*, 359). This scene is followed by the execution of a new recipe Goldy titles the *unorthodox shepherd* while she keeps revising unanswered questions that could solve a murder committed. While working on both the recipe as well as the several clues, facts that she has gathered so far, she also keeps wondering about the involvement of Sandee Brisbane the victim turned murderer responsible for Goldy’s ex-husband’s death. One may see, therefore, the winning combination of putting ingredients together for a dish to be served up for dinner along with serving up a murderer to the police.

It is further remarkable that this Episcopalian caterer turned sleuth, moves from recipe cards to booting up the computer for her recipes, and the novels in themselves moved from showcasing recipes in the middle of the books, interrupting the narrative as a structure from time to time, to listing out the recipes (all at once) at the end of the book. The idea in the initial run of the books was perhaps, to engage the reader gripped with the wanting to know who the murderer is, to relax, calm down, and experience a culinary delight in the mouth-watering recipes that keep coming into play time and again throughout the novels. The solve, impactful as it is, gets help, much like the detective in the series, from the cooking, food, recipes, ingredients, and the overall culinary experience the books aim to achieve and offer out there for its readers/audiences.

A third enthralling aspect of this mix, and melange is the fact that Goldy’s profession as a caterer helps her in her detection, sleuthing, and/or detective work. Everyone wants to gossip with the caterer. This is another recurrent and visible pattern within the Goldy Bear-Schulz’s culinary mystery series. Goldy right from the beginning is extremely confident about solving crime, which Detective Tom Schulz finds extremely appealing, alluring, and attractive in the good cook turned investigator. It is, in fact, important to note that this is the kind of confidence lacking in Tom himself, despite or because of his professional limitations. While Tom is bound by the word of the law, the people he meets surrounding a crime are immediately on the defensive because of a man in uniform. The truth that needs to come out when there are no more secrets can never happen in Tom’s experience as everyone tends to hide something from the police. This hurdle, however, does not exist for Goldy at all. She belongs to a working class that should be seen working silently, listen to everyone’s troubles and woes in life but never be heard. This disregard as well as an innate trust in one’s caterer helps her solve cases more often than most cops. Consequently, her true profession as a caterer lends a helping hand to Goldy in her sleuthing, detection, and crime fighting, which incidentally is not her chosen job or profession. This makes her a unique detective in her own right.

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The real question is, will Ms. Goldy Bear-Schulz who helps feed other people's "little grey cells" ever be allowed to take her seat amongst the upper crust, stalwart detectives like Monsieur Poirot, Miss Marple, Sherlock Holmes, Tommy and Tuppence, Dr. Watson, Auguste Dupin, or any other detective from police stations and precincts? Does Goldy Bear have "little grey cells" that are working all the time, "mon ami?" Could she be a classic Hercule Poirot? Yes and no. In terms of the "little grey cells" yes; in fact, her "little grey cells" seem to be overworked and are also in perpetual espresso effected overdrive.

But fundamentally she is no Hercule Poirot. For one, she is not a man and for two her exclusive skills at detection are not her *only* asset (as has been noted earlier). This is what makes Goldy Bear-Schulz exceptional and considerably different from detectives established in the genre of detective fiction. For our detective does not have the luxury of time, energy, financial stability, or the ambience required to be a full-fledged detective, who sits back to eat some exotic dish cooked by someone else, wondering why one must have only one stomach, and then to get the grey cells into working mode. Goldy Bear ends up cooking for herself and others, serves up the dishes she whips up for paying customers and their guests, cleaning up afterwards, eating the dishes that she indulges in, and figuring out who could have committed a particularly grizzly murder while driving her *truck* all over Aspen Meadow. Along the same lines, one can never mistake Goldy Bear-Korman-Schulz to be a Sherlock Holmes either. Too many responsibilities and worries over how to deal with bringing up a young son who has already witnessed many an emotional upheaval in his young life already, Goldy cannot afford to indulge in any narcotic stronger than caffeine<sup>viii</sup>.

It may be also said safely, that Goldy Bear-Schulz can be no Miss Marple either; for she is no elderly woman with excess of time on her hands working out mysteries over dainty cups of tea. She does have the small-town life, thought process, attitude, as well as the observant personality she shares with Miss Marple but that is where we can say the comparison ends. From that point Goldy Bear-Schulz deviates radically, for she does not match up to any aspect of the image that Miss Marple inspires in her audiences' minds. In conclusion, it would be easy to claim that Davidson's culinary mystery series is a creation which readers might consider romancing over a weekend, rather than allow into an intellectual arena of any sort. That would be "elementary dear Watson", for Goldy has an "unscientific estimation" (Davidson, *Sweet Revenge*, 338) along with cuisine and catering as tools to help in her detection<sup>ix</sup>.

In a move to belong to the big guns of detective fiction world however, one cannot ignore this single mother, a victim of physical abuse within a marriage, a divorcee trying to put a failed marriage behind her, a woman who marries a second time and chooses to wed a cop, a woman with a broken thumb in three different places, a woman who has the courage to make another ex-wife of her ex-husband's Marla Korman her best friend, a woman who makes a success of her life in the same town where she has failed utterly, miserably, completely, a woman who chooses not to run away entirely but face her nemesis head-on, a caterer dealing with insults of different shades on a daily basis<sup>x</sup> to a successful caterer/detective who is sought out to help solve crime committed, a financially poverty stricken individual to a financially independent woman of her own standing, a woman who moves

from hand written recipes on cards to firing up a computer for her recipes typed out and stored—this is no ordinary woman, mother, wife, friend, mentor, cook, or detective. Our caterer turned sleuth, completely out of shape, robust, freckled, with locks of gold on her head, waking up to yoga routines, overstressed otherwise, glugging down cups and cups of espresso, working and cooking all the time while solving mysteries and crime is all at once lovable, irresistible, unavoidable, and un-ignorable; a detective with a heart and the courage to make her own unique place in the world of detective fiction.

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End Notes:

<sup>i</sup> This success, in terms of running a business, is seen only by the fourteenth novel in the series. By this time, we also see Goldy's relative success in her personal life as well.

<sup>ii</sup> Calling Goldy "relaxed" in this context is high exaggeration because this central character of the series is never seen completely relaxed or stress-free ever.

<sup>iii</sup> A series which incidentally ends with book seventeen.

<sup>iv</sup> Falls as in one of the many seasons, not falling down which Goldy manages to do most if not all the time.

<sup>v</sup> It needs to be noted here that these murders are "unplanned" as far as Goldy is concerned; however, these murders are quite planned as far as the murderer is concerned.

<sup>vi</sup> The books in the series always revisit Goldy's dark past with several recollections of Goldy's abuse at the hands of the JERK, which almost always includes a reference to her thumb which will not bend properly because it was broken in three places with the help of a hammer by her ex-husband John Richard Korman.

<sup>vii</sup> The genre in focus being detective fiction in a broad framework and culinary mysteries specifically.

<sup>viii</sup> "I went down to the kitchen. When other people's lives get chaotic, they smoke, they drink, they exercise, they shop. I cook. At the moment it seemed we all needed the comfort of homemade bread" (Davidson, *The Cereal Murders*, 195).

<sup>ix</sup> "Nothing equals mixing and baking to clear the head..." (Davidson, *Catering to Nobody*, 91)

<sup>x</sup> "Julian had graduated from Elk Park Prep with high honors; he had been at Cornell before transferring to the University of Colorado. But clients inevitably treated us as if we were uneducated dunces" (Davidson, *Sweet Revenge*, 252)