



Family Jewels (A Stone Barrington Novel)

By *Stuart Woods*

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Stone Barrington is back and better than ever in the newest thriller from the #1 *New York Times*—bestselling author.

Stone Barrington's newest client seems to be a magnet for trouble. A poised lady of considerable wealth, she's looking for help discouraging the attentions of a tenacious gentleman. But no sooner does Stone fend off the party in question than his client becomes involved in two lethal crimes.

With suspects aplenty, Stone must probe deep into his client's life to find the truth, and he discovers that the heart of the mystery may be a famous missing piece of history, a stunningly beautiful vestige of a bygone era. It's a piece with a long and storied past and untold value . . . the kind of relic someone might kill to obtain.

Among the upper crust nearly everyone has buried a skeleton or two, and it will take all of Stone's investigative powers to determine whose secrets are harmless, and whose are deadly.

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Editorial Review

Review

Praise for *Family Jewels*

“Tony trappings, colorful characters, and a magnificent McGuffin . . . Dry-witted dialogue keeps the tone light and drives this glossy, modern take on the classic detective story.”—*Publishers Weekly*

“Woods creates another action-packed thriller for his readers to devour, with plenty of interesting twists and turns that make for a nonstop, can’t catch-your-breath read.”—*Booklist*

Praise for *Scandalous Behavior*

“Addictive . . . Pick [Scandalous Behavior] up at your peril. You can get hooked.”—*Lincoln Journal-Star*

“Woods offers another wild ride with his hero, bringing readers back into a world of action-packed adventure, murder and mayhem, steamy romance, and a twist you don’t see coming.”—*Booklist*

“Extravagant . . . a series of escalating, sometimes amusing, tit-for-tat maneuvers ensue and eventually turn deadly. . . . Stone remains unflappable.”—*Publishers Weekly*

Praise for the Stone Barrington novels:

“Plenty of fast-paced action and deluxe experiences that keep the pages turning. Woods is masterful with his use of dialogue and creates natural and vivid scenes for his readers to enjoy.”—*The Sun News*

“Stone Barrington is back to give fans another fun-filled ride of action and suspense.”—*Suspense Magazine*

About the Author

Stuart Woods is the author of more than sixty novels. He is a native of Georgia and began his writing career in the advertising industry. *Chiefs*, his debut in 1981, won the Edgar Award. An avid sailor and pilot, Woods lives in Florida, Maine, and New Mexico.

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1

Stone Barrington fell into his chair at his desk. He had flown his airplane across the Atlantic from England the day before, and however much sleep he had had that night had not been enough. Joan Robertson, his secretary came into his office bearing a mug of steaming coffee.

“Welcome back,” she said. “You look terrible.”

“Thanks for confirming that for me. It’s jet lag.”

“I thought you didn’t get that, if you flew your own airplane.”

“A myth, apparently.” He tasted the coffee and burned his tongue. He made a face. “Do you have to make

it this hot?"

"That is the temperature that the coffee pot operates at, and you've never complained about it before. Let it sit there for a minute or two, and it'll cool down. Your first patient of the day is waiting to see you."

"Patient? What am I, a dentist?"

"More of a psychiatrist, I guess. Somehow, I think of them all as patients."

"I don't have any appointments this morning."

"This one is a walk-in."

"Do we take walk-ins here? I don't remember doing that."

"Sure, we do. Some of your most interesting patients have been walk-ins. And anyway, you look as though you could use something to take your mind off the hangover."

"It's not a hangover; it's jet lag. I don't drink when I fly."

"Take your mind off the jet lag, then."

"Oh, all right, send him in."

"Sexist! You assume it's a man."

"All right, send *her* in."

"Now you're assuming it's a woman."

"I'm running out of choices; humor me."

"Right." Joan walked out of the office, and he heard her say, "The doctor will see you now." This was followed by a laugh, a female laugh. Joan led in a woman. "This is Mr. Barrington; Mr. Barrington, this is Ms. Fisk."

Stone tried to focus on her and failed. The blur of her was tall and slim, though, and that was a start.

"How do you do?" she asked in a low-pitched voice.

Stone felt as if he were Humphrey Bogart, meeting Lauren Bacall for the first time. "Very well, thank you," he said, struggling to his feet and extending a hand. "Won't you sit down?"

She shook his hand, then sat down across the desk from him and crossed her legs. "Thank you."

"Would you like some coffee?"

"You look as though you need it more than I," she said.

“There’s enough for both of us.”

“I’ve already had my morning coffee, and a second cup would just get me wired.”

It was easier to focus on her sitting down, and, once he was able to focus, it was very pleasant, too. She had blonde hair, parted on the right and held back by a tortoise-shell clip. “It’s not working that way for me - not yet, anyway.” He took another sip and didn’t burn his tongue.

“You look jet-lagged.”

“I am; thank you for not suggesting I have a hangover.”

“You’re welcome. Where have you flown in from?”

“The south of England.”

“London?”

“Farther south; Hampshire.

”

“But you flew from London.”

“No, from Hampshire.”

“I didn’t know you could do that - fly from Hampshire to New York.”

“You can, but you have to fly the airplane yourself.”

“And it would have to be a big enough airplane to have that kind of range.”

“No, just big enough to make it to the Azores, then Newfoundland, then Teterboro.”

“And how big is that?”

“You know Citations?”

“Yes, my former husband owned one, until the bank took it away from him.”

“A Citation M2.”

“Oh. I used to fly a Bonanza.”

The conversation was cutting the fog, so he continued. “So did I: a B-36TC.”

“Mine was an A36.”

“Sweet airplane, isn’t it?”

“It was. My husband made me sell it when we got married; he was afraid to fly with me.”

“The Swine.”

“Now that you mention it, yes. He’s why I’m here.”

“Are you divorced?”

“Yes, almost a year ago.”

“Did you get a satisfactory settlement?”

“No, but he did.”

“Ah.”

“Exactly.”

“Does he want more?”

“Yes, but he knows he has no chance of that.”

“Then what’s the problem?”

“He won’t leave me alone: he follows me, turns up at places I’m going.”

“Does he bother you on those occasions?”

“Yes. Oh, he doesn’t push me around or anything; he just stares at me unrelentingly.”

“There’s a word for that: stalking. And there’s a very useful New York State law against it.”

“Sure there is, but it won’t do me any good when I’m dead.”

“Has he threatened you?”

“He doesn’t speak, he just stares.”

“But you think he wants to kill you?”

“I know he does. He told me right after we were married that if I ever left him, he’d kill me. I have no reason to doubt him.”

“How long were you married?”

“About five months, before I filed for divorce.”

“And you’ve been divorced for nearly a year?”

“That’s correct.”

Stone took a big swig of the coffee; it was clearing his head. “Then why hasn’t he killed you?”

“He just isn’t ready yet. Harvey was always a planner; I don’t think that has changed.”

Stone took a yellow pad from a desk drawer and picked up a pen. “All right, let’s start at the beginning: What is your name?”

“Carrie Jarman Fisk.”

“Jarman?”

“My father was in shoes; Jarman shoes.”

“I see. Address?”

She gave him a very, very good Park Avenue address.

“Age?”

“That’s rude.”

“I’m guessing, forty . . .”

“Thirty-four.”

“That was my first guess. Are you employed, Ms. Fisk?”

“Self-employed; I’m an investor.”

“Any children?”

“None; I took precautions.”

“What is your ex-husband’s name?”

“Harvey Biggers.”

“Is he employed?”

“Yes.”

“What is his business?”

“Managing my money.”

“Before that?”

“Managing other peoples’ money.”

“Was he successful at managing your money?”

“He would have been an abject failure, if I had listened to him.”

“Beg pardon? He didn’t have control of your funds?”

“Certainly not, I may have been stupid to marry him, but I’m not crazy. He *thought* he managed my money, but he had no control of it. He would say, “Sell Apple,” and I’d pretend to call my broker and tell him to sell Apple.”

“So you never sold Apple?”

“Of course not; my father left those shares to me, 25,000 of them; also 10,000 shares of a very nice company called Berkshire-Hathaway.”

“Your father was a good stock picker. How long ago did he leave you these shares?”

“He died when I was seven.”

“You said he was in shoes?”

“He was a traveling salesman; he sold men’s suits and shoes to stores all over the southeast. But he was also a very good poker player, very shrewd. He played poker almost every night for forty years when he was on the road, and he banked his winnings. Then, once a month, he would invest them. The shares were put into a trust when he died, and I got control when I was twenty-five.”

“And when you divorced, what did you have to give your husband?”

“A hundred thousand dollars.”

“That was it?”

“Yep; I wrote him a check, moved his stuff out of my apartment, changed the locks and told the doormen to call the police if he ever showed up.”

“Did you have a restraining order against him?”

“Yes, one that prevents him from coming closer to me than a hundred feet, and he neverhas.”

“So, you’re legally divorced, your settlement was paid, and he hasn’t violated the TRO?”

“That is correct.”

“Then there’s nothing we can do. Legally.”

“How about illegally?”

“No, no, don’t even think that. Do you have your ex-husband’s address?”

She gave him the number of an apartment building on Second Avenue. “It’s a studio,” she said. “I suppose he’s living frugally.”

“Do you have a will?”

She blinked. “Yes; I forgot. And he’s the sole heir.. How could I forget that?” She slapped her forehead.

“Where is the original of the will?”

“It’s in my safe, in my apartment.”

“Well, when it’s convenient, get it to me. In the meantime, let’s draw a new will.”

“Right now?”

“The sooner the better,” Stone said. “And we’ll send your ex-husband a copy.”

2

Stone put away his pad. “I’ll have this typed up and messengered to you. You can come back here and execute it after you’ve checked it over.”

“The doormen in my building often witness documents for me; I’ll get them to do it and save a trip back.

“Now,” he said, “do you mind having some company for a few days?”

“Are you volunteering?” she asked, a little smile on her face.

“I’m volunteering a man who works for me; his name is Fred Flicker, and he is very competent.”

“And what will his duties be?”

“To see that you move about safely, and to frighten your ex-husband.”

“Harvey was a boxing champion at Yale,” she said. “He doesn’t frighten easily.”

“He hasn’t met Fred Flicker. Shall I introduce you?”

“All right.”

Stone buzzed Joan. “Please ask Fred to join us.” He hung up the phone. “He’ll be just a moment.”

A moment later, Fred Flicker entered the room. “You rang, sir?” Fred Flicker would have been about five-six, if he wore heels, which he did not.

“I did, Fred. This is Ms. Fiske; I would like you to accompany her everywhere she goes for the next few days. Her ex-husband has been following her, and when given the opportunity, I would like you to persuade him to discontinue that activity.”

“How much persuasion may I use, sir?”

“You may not harm him, except in self-defense.”

“Will he be armed?”

Stone looked at Carrie and raised his eyebrows

“He owns guns,” she said. “I don’t know if he has been walking around armed.”

“Does he have a license to do so?”

“I’m not sure.”

“I expect not; do you mind if he is sent to prison for a while?”

“For killing me? For a very long time, please.”

“No, for carrying a gun illegally.”

“Sure, why not?”

“Fred, if you learn that Mr. Harvey Biggers - that’s his name - is carrying, take steps.”

“Quite, sir.”

“You may go and get the car, Fred. Ms. Fisk will meet you outside momentarily.”

Fred disappeared.

“You really think this is going to work?” she asked.

“Very probably. Bullies don’t like being confronted by those they have not chosen to bully.”

“Harvey is a bully, now that you mention it, but I’m not sure that little man will frighten him.”

“That little man, as you describe him, is a retired regimental sergeant of the Royal Marine Commandos. He is extraordinarily qualified to frighten bullies.”

“I can’t wait to see this.”

“Then go somewhere today where you think Harvey might follow you. Fred is waiting outside in my car. I would like him to drive you anywhere you wish to go.”

“For how long?”

“Until Harvey vanishes.”

“Well,” she said, getting to her feet, “I guess this is worth a try. What do we do if it doesn’t work?”

“We’ll cross that gutter when we come to it.” Stone shook her hand, and she left his office. He heard the

outside door close behind her.

Joan came in. "What was she about?"

"About an ex-husband who won't leave her alone."

"Oh, one of those."

"Yes, one of those."

"You seem to have known a number of women with ex-husbands or boyfriends like that."

"It has been my lot in life to know such women."

"You attract them the way other people attract mosquitos; how did you attract this one?"

"I forgot to ask her who recommended me."

"She reminds me of a young Lauren Bacall."

"Me, too."

"Don't start thinking you're Humphrey Bogart," she said, then went back to her desk. A moment later she buzzed him. "Dino on one."

Stone picked up the phone. "Good morning," he said.

"It's not bad," Dino replied. Back when Stone had been an NYPD detective, he and Dino had been partners. Dino had prospered and was now the New York City Police Commissioner.

"I'm surprised you're not jet-lagged," Stone said.

"I got some sleep on the airplane, while you were working in the front office."

"I wish I could say that," Stone said. "I woke up feeling like one of the undead. Funny, though, I feel better now."

"How'd you get over that? It's too early in the morning for you to have met a new woman."

"Actually," Stone said, "it's not."

3

Fred Flicker had a good look at Ms. Fisk as he held open the door of the Bentley. Pretty good, he thought, but Fred was a harsh judge of flesh. He got into the driver's seat.

"And where would you like to go, Madam?" he asked.

"Madam? Really?"

“Would you prefer Miss?”

“Infinitely.”

“Where would you like to go, Miss?”

“Home?”

“Would you like to give me a hint?”

“Oh, I’m sorry; 740 Park Avenue.”

“Yes, Miss.” Fred put the car in gear and drove away. Fifteen minutes later he pulled to a stop in front of her building, got out and opened the door for her.

“Thank you, Fred.”

He handed her a card. “Please call me at this number when you’re ready to go out, Miss. I’ll be here in five minutes.”

“Actually,” she said, “I’d rather just go to lunch now; I’m presentable; no need to go upstairs.” She got back into the car.

Fred mounted the driver’s seat again. “Where to, Miss?”

“The boathouse in Central Park,” she said, dialing a number on her cell phone.

“Yes, Miss.” Ten minutes later they were there. Fred assisted her from the car, then parked it and followed her into the restaurant. She was seated at an outside table, overlooking the lake. A woman entered, they air-kissed, and the two women sat down together.

Fred stood to one side of the seating area and was approached by the headwaiter.

“May I help you?” the man asked, in a tone that sounded as if he had no wish to help.

“Security,” Fred said, nodding toward the Fisk table.

“Really?”

“Really; trust me.”

“Oh, all right.” He stalked away.

A moment later he returned, leading a large, handsome gentleman. Fred looked him over: six-five, maybe six-six, two-twenty, chiseled features, square jaw. He was seated on the opposite side of the outdoor area from where Ms. Fisk sat. He looked at her; she looked at the man and nodded.

Fred walked over to the man’s table. “Good afternoon,” he said.

The man looked at him disdainfully. "Is it?"

"Take my word for it," Fred replied. I am a security person for Ms. Fisk."

The man looked him up and down. "Really?"

"Really. She would be very grateful if you would leave the restaurant and not follow her anywhere again."

The man stood up and approached Fred, who remained rooted to the spot. He reached out, put his hands under Fred's arms and lifted him like a child, until they were nose to nose. "I would be very grateful if you would go away and stay away," he said.

Fred reached out with both hands and briefly explored the man's ribcage. Gun under the left armpit. "Kindly put me down and take your hands away," he said.

"Or what?"

"Or I'll hurt you."

Broad smile. "I'd like to see you try."

Fred reached out with both hands, took the man by his ears and head-butted him squarely in the nose, hard. The man dropped him, and Fred landed on his toes. The man clapped a hand over his nose, and blood was seeped between his fingers. Fred picked up a napkin from the table and handed it to him. "Use this," he said, "and if I were you I'd run over to the nearest Emergency Room and have that nose looked at; it will need setting."

While Fred waited for a reply, the headwaiter appeared again, this time in the company of two uniformed police officers.

"Can you do something about this, please?" he said, indicating Fred.

"Okay, what's happening here?" one of the cops said.

"This man assaulted me," Fred replied evenly. "It was necessary for me to defend myself."

The cop removed the man's hand from his face and took a look at his nose, then he turned to Fred. "You did that? How'd you reach that high?"

"He lifted me into range," Fred replied. "And I have reason to believe that he is armed; shoulder holster, left side."

"Oh, yeah? The cop patted the area, then reached inside the man's jacket and pulled out a small, 9 mm pistol. "Tell you what," he said. "We'll give you a lift to the ER, and on the way we can have a little chat about this." He held up the gun.

The man nodded, and the two policemen escorted him from the restaurant. Fred walked over to Ms. Fisk's table. "I don't believe he'll bother you for the remainder of the day, Miss."

"I'm so glad," Ms. Fisk replied. "In that case, I don't believe I'll need you for the rest of the day, Fred. You

may convey the news to Mr. Barrington.”

“I will do so, Miss,” Fred replied. “Good day. He walked out of the restaurant and went for the car.

Half an hour later, Fred had conveyed the news to Mr. Barrington.

“Well done,” Stone said.

“Thank you, sir.”

“Do you think he got the message?”

“If he didn’t, next time I’ll break his patella; that will keep him out of action for a while.”

“As long as it’s in self defense,” Stone said, and Fred took his leave.

Stone joined Dino and Viv for dinner at Patroon that evening, and he told them about Fred’s actions that afternoon.

“Sounds like a law-abiding citizen to me,” Dino said

“Fred or the other guy?”

“Fred, of course. It would have weighed with the arresting officer that he was so much smaller than the one who was doing the bleeding. What was this all about?”

“Recently divorced woman with an ex-husband who can’t face reality and is stalking her. Dino, to Stone’s astonishment, began to sing: “It seems to me I’ve heard that song before; it’s from an old familiar score, I know it well that melody . . .”

”Dino,” Viv said. “I never knew you could sing.”

“He can’t,” Stone replied.

“Still, the song resonates, doesn’t it?” Dino asked. “Jule Styne and Sammy Cahn.”

“I’ll bet you didn’t know he was a musicologist, either,” Stone said to Viv.

“I learn something new about him every . . . month, or so,” she replied.

“Half the women Stone has ever been involved with had angry men in the way.”

“I’m not involved with her,” Stone said, “she’s a client.”

“That never got in the way before, and I don’t think the American Bar Association would like it.”

“So, I offer some of my clients a broad range of services.”

Viv burst out laughing. “Don’t tell me; just let my imagination run wild.”

Users Review

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