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'How to murder your husband' writer on trial for murder of husband

A writer who penned a piece titled "How To Murder Your Husband" is on trial in the United States for...killing her husband. It is a case that has all the hallmarks of classic detective fiction—a huge insurance payout, an impeccable suspect who claims to have amnesia, a missing weapon, and surveillance footage that seems to have caught the culprit red-handed. But for novelist Nancy Crampton Brophy, it's not the plot of her latest book; it's real life in an Oregon court room.

Crampton Brophy, whose "Wrong Never Felt So Right" series of novels include "The Wrong Husband" and "The Wrong Lover," stands accused of shooting Daniel Brophy, using a gun whose now-missing barrel she bought on eBay. Prosecutors say the 71-year-old writer was struggling to make payments on her mortgage, but kept up multiple life insurance policies that would pay out a total of \$1.4 million in the event of her husband's demise.

"I do better with Dan alive financially than I do with Dan dead," she said as she took the stand in Portland this week, The Oregonian newspaper reported. "Where is the motivation I would ask you? An editor would laugh and say, 'I think you need to work harder on this story, you have a big hole in it.'" Prosecutor Shawn Overstreet said security camera footage had captured Crampton Brophy's minivan outside the Oregon Culinary Institute on June 2, 2018 at almost exactly the time her chef husband was killed in one of the school's classrooms.

"You were there at the same time that someone happens to be shooting your husband...with the exact type of gun that you own and which is now mysteriously missing," he said. Crampton Brophy told the court she has no memory of being there, though acknowledges she must have been, insisting the CCTV images show her in the area because she was driving around getting inspiration for a story. "This is not a man I would have



shot because I had a memory issue. It seems to me if I had shot him, I would know every detail."

Daniel Brophy, 63, was found dead that morning by students readying for a class. He had been shot twice. Investigators say the barrel from the Glock handgun used in the slaying was

purchased by the suspect on eBay. That barrel—which would contain damning forensic clues—has never been recovered, despite an exhaustive police search.

Crampton Brophy admits having bought a Glock pistol, which she says was for her husband to protect himself when he went mushroom hunting in the

woods, but says the missing barrel was purchased as part of research for an unfinished novel. "There was a big separation between what was for writing and what was for protection," she told the court, The Oregonian reported.

Prosecutors say Crampton Brophy, whose "How To Murder Your Husband" remains accessible online and whose books can be bought on Amazon, was facing financial ruin before her husband's death, but continued to pay into 10 separate life insurance policies. The blog on murdering a husband discusses methods and motivations for dispatching an unwanted spouse. These include financial gain and the use of a firearm, although it notes guns are "loud, messy, require some skill." "But the thing I know about murder is that every one of us have it in him/her when pushed far enough," the essay says. The trial, which began in early April, is ongoing. — AFP



Russian Bolshoi Ballet's former prima ballerina Olga Smirnova rehearses in a studio at the Dutch National Opera. — AFP photos



Russian Bolshoi Ballet's former prima ballerina Olga Smirnova (left) rehearses.

RUSSIAN BALLET STAR 'FOLLOWED CONSCIENCE' TO LEAVE BOLSHOI

Russian superstar ballerina Olga Smirnova quit the Bolshoi Ballet over Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, but says the famed dance company will outlive the vagaries of war. "History changes, but the Bolshoi stays," Smirnova told AFP as she rehearsed in Amsterdam, where she joined the Dutch National Ballet in March. Smirnova, who made headlines when she left the Bolshoi, added: "I had to follow my conscience."



Russian Bolshoi Ballet's former prima ballerina Olga Smirnova poses during a photo session at the Dutch National Opera.

The 30-year-old prima ballerina said she feared for the future of dancers, choreographers and artists still left at the Bolshoi, as Russia became increasingly isolated globally because of its decision to attack its neighbor. "For the Bolshoi 20 years is nothing, but for a dancer it's their whole life," Smirnova told AFP in an interview just ahead of a rehearsal for veteran Dutch choreographer Hans van Manen's ballet "Frank Bridge Variations".

For a decade, Smirnova was one of the faces of the company as a prima ballerina, renowned for her slender physique, almond-shaped eyes and swan-like neck with looks described by a British daily as

"the perfect instrument of her art form" evoking a "stunning perfection."

"Now the Bolshoi is also isolated from the world. I had an amazing 10 years working at the Bolshoi, because the best choreographers in the world could come to stage, to create even original ballets." "It really felt like I was part of the world. I think all of this ended with this war," Smirnova said in between her busy schedule.

'Honest with myself'

Even during the Cold War, the Bolshoi's ballet tours to the West were seen as a bridge with the Soviet Union. But after Russia's February 24 invasion, all tours have been cancelled and the Bolshoi's stars are no longer invited abroad. Choreographers like Jean-Christophe Maillot and Alexei Ratmansky have asked the Bolshoi to suspend the performance rights of their ballets.

Smirnova now fears Russian dancers will lose the chance to "discover new worlds" like she and her generation did with choreographers such as Americans John Neumeier and William Forsythe, France's Pierre Lacotte, or Britain's Christopher Wheeldon. However Smirnova refuses to call her decision a "defection", a word used during Soviet times when ballet legends such as Rudolf Nureyev and Mikhail Baryshnikov crossed the Iron Curtain to the West. "I think I was honest with myself and just followed my conscience... I thought it was right for me," said Smirnova, becoming visibly emotional.

"I felt so terribly sorry about all this... all these people who... lost their houses," she said. Smirnova said she was shocked when learning of Moscow's invasion—which has now seen more than six million refugees fleeing Ukraine. She thought the invasion would end soon.

But "five or six days later" she wrote on the Telegram social messaging platform "I am against the war with all my soul. I never

believed I could be ashamed of Russia." After leaving Moscow, she travelled to Dubai to treat an injury—and then decided to take the plunge. "Nobody knew about it, except my husband and the artistic director of the Dutch National Ballet, Ted Brandsen," Smirnova said.

'Too much thinking'

Her decision was a shock for her parents back in Russia. "For them it's still not really acceptable that I left the country and left the Bolshoi," she said. "My colleagues almost didn't react," when Smirnova left. "I don't know what they think. Maybe they didn't understand my decision. Maybe they are just protecting themselves from the truth... just thinking 'I'm a dancer, I am far from these political things.'" "I feel like I've

lost almost all connection with the dancers from the Bolshoi," she said.

Smirnova said however she was welcomed with open arms in the Netherlands, feeling "more and more at home in Amsterdam" where she moved into a new apartment a day before the interview. In April, she performed the titular role in a new production of classical ballet "Raymonda". "I was put in a ballet routine from the first days. I felt like I'm (back) in my normal life. I was able to rehearse... that made me feel like normal." Dancing "saved me from too much thinking," she said. But one dream remains for Smirnova. "I would love to come to the Paris Opera to dance. I've never danced at the Palais Garnier." — AFP



Russian Bolshoi Ballet's former prima ballerina Olga Smirnova rehearses in a studio at the Dutch National Opera, in Amsterdam.

Pee pals: Dolphins taste friends' urine to know they're around

Think about people you know, and how you could tell they were around even if you couldn't see them: perhaps their voice, or a favored perfume. For bottlenose dolphins, it's the taste of urine and signature whistles that allow them to recognize their friends at a distance, according to a study published Wednesday in Science Advances. "Dolphins keep their mouths open and sample urine longer from familiar individuals than unfamiliar ones," first author Jason Bruck of the Stephen F. Austin State University in Texas wrote in an email to AFP.



"This is important because dolphins are the first vertebrate ever shown to have social recognition through taste alone." The team, which included Sam Walmsley and Vincent Janik from the University of St Andrews, wrote that the use of taste could be highly beneficial in the open ocean because urine plumes persist for a while after an animal has left. This alerts dolphins to the recent presence of that individual even if it had not signaled its presence vocally.

The question of whether animals can attach "labels" to their friends in their minds has been difficult to answer. Bottlenose dolphins, which use signature whistles to selectively address specific individuals, and can remember these for over 20 years, were thus an interesting test case. To investigate, the team presented eight dolphins with urine samples from familiar and unfamiliar individuals, finding they spent around three times as long sampling urine from those they knew.

Genital inspection, in which a dolphin uses its jaw to touch the genitals of another individual, is common in their social interactions, providing a good opportunity to learn the taste of others' urine. For the purposes of this study, the dolphins were trained to provide urine samples on demand in exchange for food. Dolphins do not have olfactory bulbs, leaving the team certain it was taste and not smell at play.

For the second part of the experiment, the team paired urine samples with recordings of signature whistles played via underwater speakers, corresponding to either the same dolphin that provided the urine sample, or a mismatched sample. Dolphins remained close to the speaker longer when the vocalizations matched the urine samples—potentially indicating that the two congruent lines of evidence together evoked more interest.

"It is not every day that scientists find evidence of 'noun'-like use of signals in a non-human vocal system. That's pretty exciting," Bruck told AFP. Dolphins have rich social worlds, he added, and it may be "just as advantageous for a dolphin to recognize alliance members as it is for them to recognize potential antagonists."

The team suggested that lipids were likely responsible for individual chemical signatures. "Given the recognition skills revealed in our study, we think that it is likely that dolphins can also extract other information from urine, such as reproductive state, or use pheromones to influence each other's behavior," they wrote. — AFP



This handout screenshot of Thailand's Channel 7 shows actor Russell Crowe during a cameo appearance on a current affairs show asking questions of candidates in Bangkok's governor election. — AFP

Russell Crowe quizzes Bangkok governor candidates

Hollywood star Russell Crowe quizzed candidates for Bangkok's governor election campaign in a cameo television appearance on Thursday, almost a year after his tweets on visiting the capital delighted Thais. The megapolis is preparing for its first governor poll in almost a decade on Sunday in the

first significant election since youth-led pro-democracy rallies in 2020.

The Australian actor—who regaled his 2.7 million Twitter followers with his Bangkok adventures while filming Vietnam War-era drama "The Greatest Beer Run Ever"—beamed into Thailand's Channel 7 daily current affairs program "The Discussion". "Sa wat dee krap," Crowe said, using the Thai greeting for hello and bowing with his palms, before launching into his questions for the candidates.

He queried them on plans to mitigate the regular threat of flooding in Bangkok, and make the city more "friendly to tourists". He also asked how they would make "beautiful Bangkok even more beautiful?" During his time in the city,

Crowe photographed the notorious tangle of overhead cables—which led to Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha ordering local officials to fast-track efforts to put the wiring underground.

"What are your thoughts on visible power lines?" he also asked the candidates. The Thai government said Crowe's social media posts on Thailand had helped generate publicity last year ahead of the kingdom's official border reopening in early November. The 58-year-old Oscar winner posted about getting lost, making friends with a meter-long monitor lizard, bike riding along the river, and admiring the city's "fascinating skyline". — AFP