
CALL OF THE NIGHTINGALE



ORIGINAL
PRESS

MYSTERY

OTHER WORKS BY SPENCER

James Cartwright Series

The Spencer Files (Book 1)

Call of the Nightingale (Book 2)

Case of the Runaway Orangutan (Book 3)

Crime Noir Short Fiction

Tell Me That You Love Me

The Polka Dot Affair

The Spanish Curse

The Final Ring

The Conversation

Devon West Mystery Series

The Crossing (Book 1)

Upcoming 2023

Tales From the Pi Café

Fool's Overture (A Devon West Mystery – Book 2)

Till' The End of Time

The 'Call of the Nightingale' is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events, locales, and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

The 'Call of the Nightingale' - Copyright © 2019-2023 by Oliver Dean Spencer. First Edition, Hardcover, February 2023, Book #2 of the James Cartwright P! Series

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other non-commercial uses permitted by copyright law.

Cover Illustration, Design © 2019-2023 by John Naccarato

Copy Editors: John MacCallum, Gabrielle Naccarato, Joe Naccarato, Brian Wilks, Teoma Naccarato

Publisher: Original Press, Montreal, Canada.

Hardcover (Cloth) - ISBN: 978-1-989577-11-0 / Hardcover (Laminate) - ISBN: 978-1-989577-05-9 / Paperback (6x9) - ISBN: 978-1-989577-00-4 / Paperback (5.25X8) - ISBN: 978-1-989577-00-4 / E-Book - ISBN: 978-1-989577-01-1

Legal Deposit—Bibliothèque et Archives Canada (BAC), Library and Archives Canada (LAC).

CALL OF THE NIGHTINGALE

A JAMES CARTWRIGHT PI
MYSTERY

BOOK TWO

Oliver Dean Spencer



ORIGINAL
PRESS

CONTENTS

阴 YIN / 09

龙 DRAGON / 98

阴 TIGER / 130

杨 YANG / 152

夜莺 NIGHTINGALE / 198

for my daughters

teoma, alessandra and gabrielle

*I know why the caged bird sings, ah me,
When his wing is bruised and his bosom sore,
When he beats his bars and would be free;
It is not a carol of joy or glee,
But a prayer that he sends from his heart's deep core,
But a plea, that upward to Heaven he flings—
I know why the caged bird sings*

Paul Laurence Dunbar

阴 YIN

PROLOGUE

IT WAS THREE IN THE MORNING when he was rudely awakened by the thunderclap of a distant storm. He decided to get up, knowing there was no way he'd be able to get back to sleep. He maneuvered himself onto the edge of his bed, his feet suspended, not quite reaching the parquet floor below. He was drenched in sweat, uncertain if it was due to the medication or the unbearable heat being generated by an unusual weather pattern.

Through his opened bedroom window, he noticed that the night sky had turned a crimson red. The moon, punctured by hues of cerulean blue, hung precariously over the withering willow trees that lined the riverbank, located several hundred yards away. The storm predicted by the forecasters was heading this way.

He remembered how a few years back, scientists had warned that the atmosphere would begin displaying erratic behavior—an inevitable result of climate change. Of course, he, like many others, hadn't believed this possible, but there it was, nature's proof, pushing back at him through the open window.

Giving up a long, anguished sigh, he got up to close the window. In the distance, he could hear a nightingale singing a mournful serenade, a warning perhaps of the impending storm. Shutting the window and engaging the latch, he turned and made his way to a white lacquered dresser stationed against the wall opposite his bed. He opened the top drawer and began searching anxiously for something. A few minutes later, his search was successful. He extracted a small piece of paper. Returning to his bed, he unfolded the paper as he'd done on numerous occasions. It was still the same as before. Blank.

He recalled how earlier that day when he examined the paper, something had been different. But he couldn't remember what. He brought it close to his face, hoping to divine its secrets. But nothing jumped out. Frustrated, he shifted his gaze to the approaching storm outside the window. Bolts of white light were now piercing the blood-red sky, interspersed with the roar of thunder. A torrential rainfall had followed, slapping the window with brute force, demanding its entrance.

Looking back at the paper, he suddenly couldn't recall why or how it had gotten into his hand. Noticing the folds etched into it, he decided to follow its pattern, first refolding the paper in half. Then in quarters. He continued folding it over on to itself until it had become impossible to add any more folds. He now began flipping it from palm to palm, as though testing its weight. Finally, he allowed it to come to rest in his right hand. He then clenched his hand, making a fist, causing the folded piece of paper to disappear within. He continued squeezing with such intensity that his knuckles turned a ghostly white. Perhaps he feared that the object would somehow escape his grasp, or worse, be stolen.

At some point, he must have felt that it was safe to release his grip—to allow the object to rest once again, unguarded, in his open palm. Tears had begun forming along the edges of his hazel eyes. He

had had an epiphany. He realized that this folded piece of paper represented the sum of his own life—his dreams, his desires, and his beliefs.

He also knew he hadn't much time left. To him, living was at best, an irrational and compulsive folding in, of one's time, of one's space, of one's experiences. He had played many roles within the time and space allotted to him—spaces which he'd occupied for the past eighty years. But like the folded piece of paper, which now lay inert in his palm, having reached the end of its folds, so he too, had reached his. All that remained was its unfolding.

2

I GOT A CALL THAT MORNING from Lieutenant William Ant from the homicide division of the 3rd Precinct. I was at my office catching up on some paperwork, which for me, amounted to playing the saxophone without a reed. The IRS had decided that I should be audited for reasons I suspect were not altogether kosher. My last case had gotten a few bureaucrats upset, so I figured they had called in some markers.

“What gives, Lieutenant?” I asked, as though I didn’t have another care in the world.

“I’ve got something for you.”

“Is it my birthday? I thought it wasn’t for another two months?”

“Funny guy. Not sure if you’ll see it as a gift once you hear all the details.”

“Such as?”

“We’ve got a girl here charged with the murder of her grandfather. The thing is, she’s not saying a word.”

“Yeah. So, what’s that got to do with me?”

“Well, we found one of your business cards in her pocket.”

“That’s weird. Haven’t printed any of those for over a decade. Doing my bit for the environment.”

“I’ll bet,” said Ant, “more likely you didn’t want to spring for new ones.”

“Now you know why. They have a habit of ending up in the strangest places. So, what’s her name?”

“Alice Carmichael. Ring any bells?”

“None.”

“Well, she keeps saying that she’ll only talk to you. So, we need you to come down.”

“What about the details of the murder?”

“That’s where it gets even stranger. But I’d rather fill you in at the precinct.”

“Wow. Here I was thinking I’d be spending a quiet, relaxing morning, working on my taxes. But if duty calls, damn the tax-man. See you in ten.”

3

OUT ON THE STREET, I began my relentless attempt to flag down a yellow cab. My powder blue Caddy had bit the dust a few weeks back, leaving me at the mercy of Motor City's cabbies. Five minutes later, one finally pulled up to the curb.

"Where to mister?" the voice boomed out once I was seated. The voice belonged to a large-bodied man of African American descent.

"3rd and W. Grand," I said. He dropped the lever attached to the cab's meter. The numbers on its LED screen started churning quickly upwards. I felt the little cash I had in my pockets, falling even faster—downwards, like water tumbling over the edge of Niagara Falls. After a few minutes of silence, the cabbie ventured a question, breaking my Zen-like relationship to the meter.

"You in trouble?" he asked, glancing over at me through his rear-view mirror.

"What makes you say that?" I threw back, surprised at the question.

"Well, there are only three reasons someone visits a cop station voluntarily. Either they're a cop, a witness, or a suspect. I figure you're not the first two."

"Are you always this upfront with your fares?"

“Depends.”

“Yeah, on what?”

“On first impressions. You strike me as someone who can handle himself. I was curious.”

“I’ve learned from experience that curiosity’s a good trait unless it involves butting one’s nose into other people’s business. Could be bad for one’s health.”

“Can’t help it. I’m a cabbie.”

“Good point. I’m in the private business.”

“Oh, yeah. What kind?”

“The private eye kind.”

“No shit, you guys exist?”

“Why? You figured we only hung out in pulp novels?”

“Well, judging by what you’re wearing, yeah,” angling his head toward me with a mischievous Cheshire cat-like smile pasted across his face.

Grabbing a glance down at my black felt fedora sitting next to me, and my matching black, cotton double-breasted suit offset by my snub nose and chiseled face—he wasn’t far off from the truth. We spent the rest of the way making small talk about the ins and outs of living in Motor City. Finally arriving at the 3rd precinct, he released the lever on the meter that demanded I pay \$14.50. I handed him a twenty and told him to keep the change. I then asked, “what name do you go by?”

“Jason.”

“Got a last name?”

“Why? What’s it to you?”

“Just curious.”

“Didn’t you just tell me that could be bad for one’s health?”

“That I did. Mine’s Cartwright. James Cartwright.” I extended my hand. He took it and shook it hard.

“Since you're so cordial and upfront, mine's Bourne. Jason Bourne.”

“As in the master spy?”

“What can I say. You don't have the exclusive on the pulp market.”

“True,” I retorted, smiling at his jab.

“Listen, James, you want me to wait for you. I've got no fares scheduled.”

“I'd say yes, but my budget's a little tight right now.”

“That's no problem. Maybe we can work out some deal.”

“Oh yeah. Like what?”

“I drive you around, and you teach me some tricks of the trade. I've been considering a change for a while. Maybe this is it.”

“Let me get this straight. You're thinking we hook up and become a thing, like Kato and the Green Hornet. Make like we're some superhero team. And what? Are you applying for Kato's role?”

“If that's what it takes.”

“Got any experience?”

“Did a couple of tours in Afghanistan. Then worked security for a firm down in Florida, before moving up here.”

“Let me think about it. Where can I reach you?” He scribbled his name and phone number on a scrap of paper and passed it to me. I pocketed it and got out with no intention of getting back to him. I enjoyed working alone. That way any screw-ups were mine, and mine alone. Besides all my previous partners, had ended up dead or seriously handicapped. But watching him pull away, I imagined tomorrow's headlines: KATO AND THE GREEN HORNET TAKE ON MOTOR CITY'S CRIMINAL UNDERWORLD.

I gave my head a few quick shakes, hoping to erase any such absurd notions, and refocused my attention back to the real matter at

hand. I made for the steps, thinking I was ready to confront whatever hornet's nest was awaiting me inside. Boy was I wrong.

4

SHE WAS THIN FRAMED, no older than seventeen, looking like she hadn't eaten for days. She was seated on a wooden chair, hunched over, knees against her chest, and dressed in a pair of jeans and a black t-shirt. The room, Ant had put her in was painted a bleach white with bright fluorescent overheads. I exited my place behind the two-way mirror where I'd been observing her while Ant gave me a run-down and made my way through a hallway to a door marked B—one of five interrogation rooms the 3rd had reserved for their guests. I walked in and sat down across from her. A plain white Ikea-like table on four legs set us apart. She didn't look up—her head now folded in and down between her knees, rocking back and forth. I waited several minutes for her to adjust to my presence. Then dove in.

“Alice.” Nothing. “Alice, you asked for me. My name's James Cartwright.” This seemed to register something. She looked up.

“Are you the James on the card?” she ventured to ask, her voice frail and suspicious.

“I figure I am. The lieutenant in charge got a hold of me based on the information on that card.”

“I need your help.”

“How so?” I was thinking what she needed was a talented lawyer and something to eat.

“My grandfather told me I could trust you, that is, if I ever got myself into trouble. I guess this would count as one of those times.” A faint smile echoed across her lips, hinting at her attempted humor. I smiled back.

A knock at the door from behind momentarily interrupted us. A uniformed cop walked in, handing me a bag of takeout food from a local fast-food restaurant which I had Lieutenant Ant order for me earlier. I passed it over to Alice, hoping that she wasn't vegetarian. She took the bag, giving me an inquisitive look and then emptied its contents. She played with the food for a while like a cat does once it has gotten hold of its prey. But within minutes, she had devoured the burger and fries.

I waited a beat, allowing her to digest her food then asked, “what was your grandfather's name?” We both knew it was a rhetorical question, but I needed an entry point, and this was as good as any.

“Oliver Carmichael,” she said.

“Do you have any idea why your grandfather had my card or why he thought I could help?”

“He told me your paths had crossed at some point. But he wouldn't tell me how.”

I had no recollection of meeting anyone matching the professor's description. But I met many people in my line of work. I'd have to check some of my back cases to see if something would click.

“What did your grandfather do for a living?”

“He was a university professor at the University of Michigan. He taught biochemistry.”

“And what were you doing at your grandfather's yesterday?”

“He had asked me to come by. He said he had something important to tell me.”

“What happened when you got there?”

“That’s the problem. All I remember is unlocking the door and walking in. After that, it’s a complete blank. Next thing I know, I’m covered in blood, handcuffed, and brought here.”

“You don’t remember calling the police?”

“No. Did I?”

“So, it seems.”

“What do you think, Mr. Cartwright? It doesn’t look good for me.”

“Truthfully, no. But the evidence is all circumstantial. There are no witnesses. Do you have a lawyer?”

“They appointed one for me.”

“Forget that. I know someone. I’ll have her come by. She’s good.”

“You don’t have to do this for me.”

“Yes, I do.”

“Why’s that?”

“Because. I believe you’re innocent.”

Ant had been watching my interaction with Alice behind the two-way mirror. As I exited, he was lying in wait for me.

“What the hell do you think you’re doing, Cartwright? I let you in there thinking you’d get a confession and save the taxpayers some dollars. Instead, you give her false hope, telling her she’s innocent.”

“She is.”

“How do you figure? Did we read the same reports?”

“On paper, it doesn’t look good.”

“What makes you say that?” he said, sarcastically. “Could it be the fact they found her next to her grandfather’s body, with the murder weapon in her hand, and nine stab wounds zigzagging his body?”

Or is it the fact that when she called the thing in, she admitted to the murder?”

“Like I said, it looks bad on paper.”

“So, what makes you think otherwise?”

“The way she ate her food.”

“What about it?”

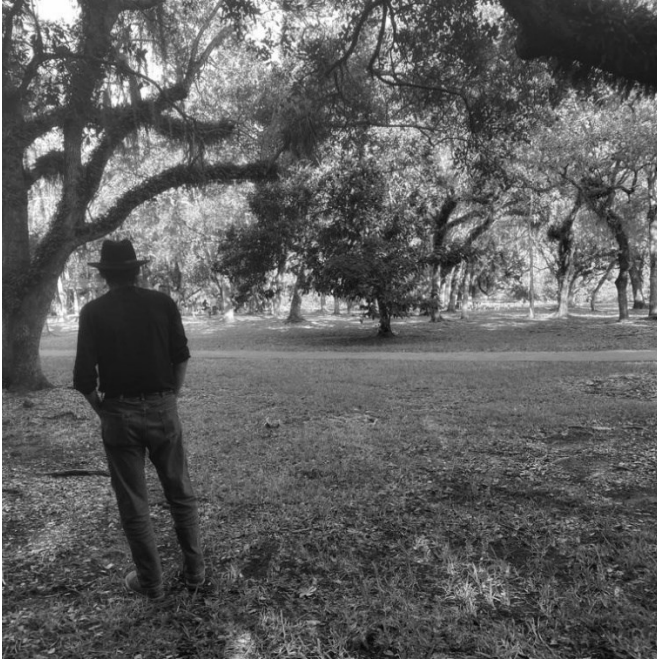
“She’s left-handed. The killer was right.”

“Maybe she’s ambidextrous.”

“Maybe. But it’s enough to get me looking elsewhere for the actual murderer.”

END OF PREVIEW

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



OLIVER DEAN SPENCER is an international crime fiction writer and artist, who spends his time between Rome, Italy and Montreal, Canada.

To date, he's published three novels as part of the James Cartwright PI series through Original Press. He is presently working on a collection of short, speculative, dark fiction entitled *Tales from the PI Café*, as well as his fifth crime fiction novel, *The Fool's Overture* (Book 2 in the Devon West Mystery Series).

Spencer received his MFA in Visual Arts from the University of Ottawa (2010) and his BFA in Fine Arts from Concordia University, Montreal (2008).

When Spencer's not writing he spends his time with his daughter or playing chess at a local cafe and painting.

Author Website: <https://www.naccarato.org/Spencer>



ORIGINAL PRESS

—•—
MYSTERY

ORIGINAL PRESS Mystery Publication
MONTREAL, CANADA