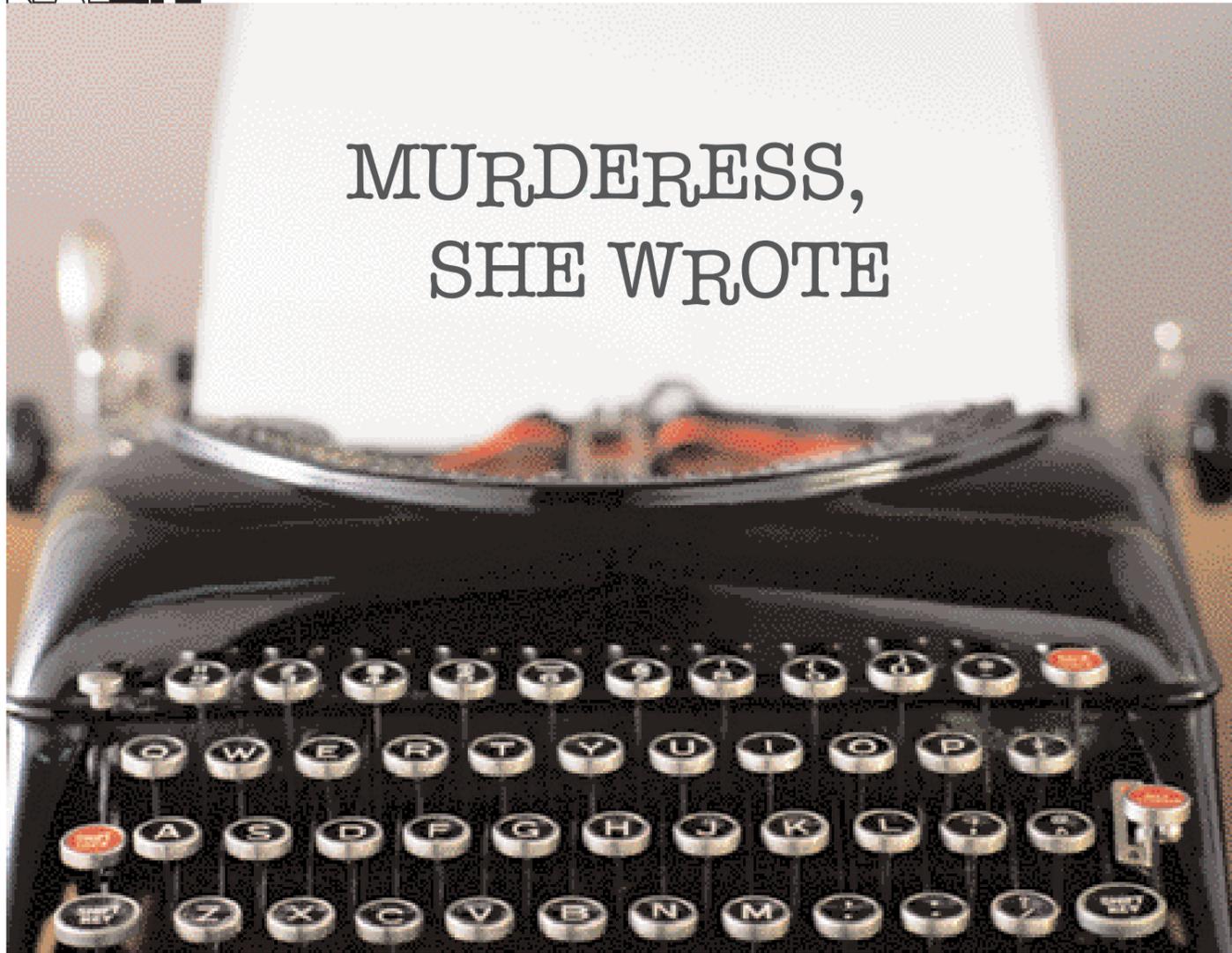


# MURDERESS, SHE WROTE



Aged 15, she helped bludgeon her best friend's mother to death. Three identity changes and 20 million books later, best-selling crime writer Anne Perry talks exclusively to **REAL**

**A**nne Perry is perched on a gilt-edged sofa in a corner of a Park Lane hotel tea room. Classical notes linger in the air and it's all very civilised, frightfully English and a far cry from the torrid events of her life half a century ago. With her crisp suit, pearl jewellery, carefully applied make-up and set hair, she looks every inch the hotel's regular, wealthy, middle-aged clientele. She's not, of course. A phenomenally successful, best-selling crime writer – who has published 49 novels and sold over 20 million copies worldwide – her groomed appearance belies a dark, turbulent and secretive past: as a 15-year-old schoolgirl, she helped to bludgeon her best friend's mother to death.

The daughter of Dr Henry Hulme, a brilliant Cambridge mathematician, Perry, 67, is intense and articulate. A fixed smile plays on her face and her steely eyes shine as she talks about her new and forthcoming book launches (four, no less) – until, that is, she catches the edge of a newspaper headline,

with large tabloid letters spelling out 'MURDERER', poking from a file in my bag. Without missing a heartbeat, she shoots me a look; she knows the real reason I'm here today. After all, this same quick-witted, lively mind plotted and executed a real-life killing on June 22, 1954.

**“IT'S ONLY BECAUSE I DID PAY FOR WHAT I DID WRONG THAT I WAS ABLE TO MOVE ON FROM IT AND REBUILD MY LIFE**

A lonely, awkward and sickly child, Anne Perry, born Juliet Hulme, in Blackheath (she has changed her name three times), had a difficult, unsettled and isolated childhood. Her parents were often away and moved house frequently; for Juliet, it was hard to build any close friendships.

If she fell ill, rather than recuperating in her mother's arms, she would be sent away from the family home. After nearly dying of pneumonia, aged

six, it was thought that she might not survive another British winter and was packed off to family friends – whom she never met before, nor since – in the Bahamas. Then 18 months later, she was reunited with her parents in New Zealand, where her father was now rector at Canterbury University College,

Christchurch. 'I felt very alien' she says.

Then there were the unhappy, tormenting times at boarding school, where she continually suffered jibes from her contemporaries. Anne recalls, 'I was different. I was English. I only went home three times a year for holidays. I suffered bullying. Schoolgirls can be terribly cruel, especially if there's anything different about you: your manners, your accent, your background.'

## A DUBIOUS DUO

In May 1952, aged 13, she joined the top stream of her local high school, where she met fellow classmate Pauline Yvonne Rieper. It was to prove a fatalistic meeting – they were complete opposites, yet inseparable. Where Juliet's family was wealthy, sophisticated and international, Pauline's was impoverished, dowdy and local, but the unlikely duo formed an immediate, intense adolescent bond.

The following May, Juliet went down with tuberculosis. Once again, she was sent away – this time to a sanatorium for five months. Her parents were on a lecture tour so her main contact with the outside world was through Pauline, who wrote daily.

Then came the bombshell news: Juliet's mother had fallen in love with a Major Bill Perry. The Hulmes were to divorce. 'I adored both my parents and I hadn't a clue the marriage was in trouble. My own safe, happy little world was destroyed overnight. I was devastated,' she recalls. 'Suddenly, overnight I didn't know what the future held.' On 3 July, Juliet and her family were to return to England. The girls were beside themselves at the prospect of being separated, nobody more so than Pauline who wanted to go with Juliet, but her mother refused. The result was a murderous rage – and a plot for Pauline to kill her own mother.

Police later discovered Pauline's childhood diary in which she wrote, 'Anger against Mother boiled up inside me as it is she who is one of the main obstacles in my path.' She had already professed a growing love for Juliet. Then on June 19, three days before the murder, she wrote, 'We discussed our plans for moidering [sic] mother and made them a little clearer. Peculiarly enough I have no conscience... Another entry read, 'Juliet rang and we decided to use a rock in a stocking rather than a sandbag. We discussed the moider fully.'

The following morning, her parents, distracted by the divorce, Juliet took half a brick from beside their garage and put it in her bag, along with a brooch stone, before meeting Pauline and her mother Honorah Parker who had agreed to join them in Christchurch's wooded Victoria Park. At 2.30pm the walking party arrived, bought some snacks from the entrance kiosk and set off around the park.

## BABES IN THE WOOD

After about half a mile, near a wooden bridge and before a loop in the path, Juliet placed the sparkling pink stone on the ground. When they turned back the girls pointed it out and, as Honorah bent to pick it up, Pauline took the stocking-wrapped brick from her bag and swung it at her mother's head. Honorah fell. Her screams were heard by a distant farm worker, but ignored. Pauline continued to hit her repeatedly, realising that more than their single planned fatal blow was needed, before handing the stocking to Juliet. Years later, Anne [Juliet] said, 'I was horrified even as the attack was happening, but I felt it was a debt and I had to continue. It was as if I was a completely different person. Immediately afterwards I felt total panic. I didn't hate her. She was somebody I barely knew.'

An hour later, at 3.30pm, the girls returned to the kiosk worker, breathless, covered in blood and shaken, claiming that Honorah had been injured in ►



ABOVE In Perry's carefully researched novels, violence is often set within a family context  
BELOW Scenes from the feature film *Heavenly Creatures*, based on Anne (Juliet) and Pauline's story, and starring Kate Winslet



FEATURE Louise Hall PHOTOGRAPHS Ian Rhind/Corbis



a fall. They begged for their fathers. Dr Hulme picked them up and drove them home. Mrs Hulme bathed them and put them to bed. The scene was reminiscent of one Perry later describes in her novel *Cardington Crescent*, where Charlotte Pitt visits her sister who has been accused of murder, puts her arm round her 'and let her weep as she needed to, holding her close and rocking a little back and forth, murmuring the old, meaningless words of comfort from childhood.' In her works, Anne Perry often plays with the psychology of motive and murder within a family situation.

Police were immediately suspicious and within hours, Juliet (Anne) was on her own again – in a cell this time. In the 1954 trial at the Supreme Court in Christchurch, the chilling facts were laid bare. Scene of the crime photos revealed that there was much blood spilt; the violence of the blows dislocated

“ I LIKE SEEING MASKS BEING RIPPED OFF: TO SEE WHAT PEOPLE WILL DO

false teeth and almost severed a finger. So vicious was the attack that Honorah vomited. She received 45 lacerations but died from shock due to multiple head wounds. The stocking-clad brick was found alongside her body. Anne [Juliet] later said of that 'nightmare' afternoon, 'I felt like I was going to my own execution.'

Both girls were tried under the glare of the media spotlight. They were quickly dubbed the 'gym-slip murderers' but, being under 18, were refused the right to testify. Once found guilty, their age spared their lives: they were too young to be given the death sentence – hanging.

A TIME TO HEAL

Juliet was sent to the notorious Mount Eden prison, Pauline elsewhere. (The two have had no contact since.) She was kept in a tiny cell in solitary

confinement, her days filled with hard labour. After three months, at her lowest ebb, alone, isolated and scared, she found forgiveness on her knees. 'I knelt by my bed and prayed. I just begged for forgiveness. I said sorry again and again – I really meant it,' she says. 'It was a monumental moment. I knew it was right.'

Soon after her 21st birthday, Juliet was released under the name Anne Stuart – to protect her identity – and she flew to England. Her father – who had also re-married – picked her up and took her to her mother's in Hexham, Northumberland. She adopted her step-father's surname, Perry, and set about rebuilding the fragments of her life. She'd learned shorthand typing in prison, so found secretarial work, though it took her a long time to learn to fit into society again. 'I remember feeling so awkward and detached,' she says.

A lifelong lover of poetry – she punctuates the interview with excerpts from GK Chesterton and James Elroy Flecker – Perry wanted two things: to write and visit America. So, in January 1967, having secured a job as a nanny, she went to San Francisco. Once again she found herself in a miserable domestic arrangement and a stranger in a strange land. Anne explored a variety of religions and felt most comfortable with becoming a Mormon because, she says, 'We believe that we are here to learn, not to go back to the innocence of childhood but to go forward to the knowledge of adulthood.' She says that she owes her survival to their belief that the fall from perfection is part of life.

WRITING AND REJECTION

When Anne returned to England in 1972, she started to put time aside to write. She began with fantasy stories, then historical novels – which were followed by a series of rejection letters – until she discovered murder mystery writing. In 1976, she won a contract. Three years on she delivered her first book, *The Cater Street Hangman*, which was later adapted to an ITV teledrama in 1998, to huge acclaim. She had found her niche: her 'raison d'être'. Over the next decade, Anne

produced a book a year, doubled sales and moved to the tiny Scottish fishing village of Portmahomack. From 9am to 9pm, she shuts herself away in her study, writing by fineliner in longhand on paper, a chapter at a time. Her attention to detail is acute; a natural born observer, she remembers her mother showing her eight-year-old self the barley heads after rain, looking for little droplets in the sunlight.

Then came the day she had always dreaded: 29 July 1994, her judgement day. She received the call she most dreaded; her dark secret was out. 'It was one of the worst moments of my life,' says Anne. The past she had evaded for so long was unlocked. Hollywood was making a feature film *Heavenly Creatures*, starring Kate Winslet, based on the friendship between Juliet and Pauline. It centred on the macabre events of that long buried day. In 1995, it was released to much acclaim. Anne's cover was blown.

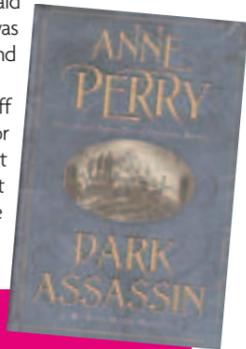
Today, she is philosophical, 'I am not able to be anything less than truthful with most people now, am I? My life is more of an open book than most people's. Have you any idea what it's like to be held up like that for public entertainment: truth and lies all in together? You're faced with saying, "Well, that's true and that's not true," and by omission anything you don't deny is assumed to be true.'

WHAT LIES BENEATH

She speaks little and writes compulsively, building her whodunnits on careful research and years of experience. 'You can only write from what you know,' she says. There's a good deal of her in every character, but she needs 20 characters for each book, so is constantly on the look out for inspiration. 'I watch. I think, "What kind of person lives behind that face?" I examine gestures, mannerisms, features, stance, body language. You'll find yourself in one of my books these days,' she says.

Many of her characters find themselves caught up in situations beyond their comprehension or control, which rollercoaster into violence – 'because a lot of crimes do occur that way', Anne says. 'I like seeing masks being ripped off – to see what people will do under pressure, when they are afraid. Those who get away with something go on suffering and never turn the corner. It's only because I paid for what I did wrong that I was able to move on from it and rebuild my life.'

And with that, she rushes off to board her sleeper train for Scotland to write and edit some more. Her most recent novel, *Dark Assassin*, is the latest in a murder mystery series set in Victorian London.



To order your copy of *Dark Assassin* by Anne Perry (published by Headline) at the special price of £16.99 with free P&P (RRP £19.99), call 0870 755 2122 and quote offer code BSH272, or send a cheque made payable to Bookshop Partnership Ltd to: Dark Assassin, Offer BSH272, PO Box 104, Ludlow SY8 1YB. Please allow 28 days for delivery.