



An Unsuitable Job for a Woman (Cordelia Gray Mysteries, No. 1)

By P.D. James

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An Unsuitable Job for a Woman introduces bestselling mystery author P.D. James's courageous but vulnerable young detective, Cordelia Gray, in a "top-rated puzzle of peril that holds you all the way" (*The New York Times*).

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Editorial Review

Review

“One of the finest, most absorbing craftsmen of the profession.” (*The Washington Post*)

“One of the most chilling crime writers around.” (*Observer*)

About the Author

P.D. James is the author of twenty previous books, most of which have been filmed and broadcast on television in the United States and other countries. She spent thirty years in various departments of the British Civil Service, including the Police and Criminal Law Departments of Great Britain's Home Office. She has served as a magistrate and as a governor of the BBC. In 2000 she celebrated her eightieth birthday and published her autobiography, *Time to Be in Earnest*. The recipient of many prizes and honors, she was created Baroness James of Holland Park in 1991 and was inducted into the International Crime Writing Hall of Fame in 2008. She lives in London and Oxford.

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On the morning of Bernie Pryde's death – or it may have been the morning after, since Bernie died at his own convenience, nor did he think the estimated time of his departure worth recording – Cordelia was caught in a breakdown of the Bakerloo Line outside Lambeth North and was half an hour late at the office. She came up from Oxford Circus underground into the bright June sunshine, sped past the early morning shoppers scanning the windows of Dickins and Jones and plunged into the cacophony of Kingly Street, threading her way between the blocked pavement and the shining mass of cars and vans which packed the narrow street. The hurry she knew was irrational, a symptom of her obsession with order and punctuality. There were no appointments booked; no clients to be interviewed; no case outstanding; not even a final report to be written. She and Miss Sparshott, the temporary typist, at Cordelia's suggestion were circulating information about the Agency to all the London solicitors in the hope of attracting custom; Miss Sparshott would probably be busy with it now, eyes straying to her watch, tapping out her staccato irritation at every minute of Cordelia's lateness. She was an unprepossessing woman with lips permanently taut as if to prevent the protruding teeth from springing from her mouth, a receding chin with one coarse hair which grew as quickly as it was plucked, and fair hair set in stiff corrugated waves. That chin and mouth seemed to Cordelia the living refutation that all men are born equal and she tried from time to time to like and sympathize with Miss Sparshott, with a life lived in bedsitting rooms, measured in the five-penny pieces fed to the gas stove and circumscribed by fell seams and hand hemming. For Miss Sparshott was a skilled dressmaker, an assiduous attender at the G.L.C. evening classes. Her clothes were beautifully made but so dateless that they were never actually in fashion; straight skirts in grey or black which were exercises in how to sew a pleat or insert a zip fastener; blouses with mannish collars and cuffs in insipid pastel shades on which she distributed without discretion her collection of costume jewellery; intricately cut dresses with hems at the precise length to emphasize her shapeless legs and thick ankles.

Cordelia had no premonition of tragedy as she pushed open the street door which was kept perpetually on the latch for the convenience of the secretive and mysterious tenants and their equally mysterious visitors. The new bronze plaque to the left of the door gleamed brightly in the sun in incongruous contrast to the faded and dirt-encrusted paint. Cordelia gave it a short glance of approval.

Pryde's Detective Agency
(Props: Bernard G. Pryde Cordelia Gray)

It had taken Cordelia some weeks of patient and tactful persuasion to convince Bernie that it would be inappropriate to append the words "ex-C.I.D. Metropolitan Police" to his name or prefix "Miss" to hers. There had been no other problem over the plaque since Cordelia had brought no qualifications or relevant past experience to the partnership and indeed no capital, except her slight but tough twenty-two-year-old body, a considerable intelligence which Bernie, she suspected, had occasionally found more disconcerting than admirable, and a half exasperated, half pitying affection for Bernie himself. It was obvious very early to Cordelia that in some undramatic but positive way life had turned against him. She recognized the signs. Bernie never got the enviable front left hand seat in the bus; he couldn't admire the view from the train window without another train promptly obscuring it; the bread he dropped invariably fell buttered side downwards; the Mini, reliable enough when she drove it, stalled for Bernie at the busiest and most inconvenient intersections. She sometimes wondered whether, in accepting his offer of a partnership in a fit of depression or of perverse masochism, she was voluntarily embracing his ill-luck. She certainly never saw herself as powerful enough to change it.

The staircase smelt as always of stale sweat, furniture polish and disinfectant. The walls were dark green and were invariably damp whatever the season as if they secreted a miasma of desperate respectability and defeat. The stairs, with their ornate wrought-iron balustrade, were covered with split and stained linoleum patched by the landlord in various and contrasting colours only when a tenant complained. The Agency was on the third floor. There was no clatter of typewriter keys as Cordelia entered and she saw that Miss Sparshott was engaged in cleaning her machine, an ancient Imperial which was a constant cause of justified complaint. She looked up, her face blotched with resentment, her back as rigid as the space bar.

"I've been wondering when you would turn up, Miss Gray. I'm concerned about Mr. Pryde. I think he must be in the inner office but he's quiet, very quiet, and the door's locked."

Cordelia, chill at heart, wrenched at the door handle:

"Why didn't you do something?"

"Do what, Miss Gray? I knocked at the door and called out to him. It wasn't my place to do that, I'm only the temporary typist, I've no authority here. I should have been placed in a very embarrassing position if he had answered. After all, he's entitled to use his own office I suppose. Besides, I'm not even sure if he's there."

"He must be. The door's locked and his hat is here."

Bernie's trilby, the stained brim turned up all round, a comedian's hat, was hanging on the convoluted hatstand, a symbol of forlorn decrepitude. Cordelia was fumbling in her shoulder bag for her own key. As usual, the object most required had fallen to the bottom of the bag. Miss Sparshott began to clatter on the keys as if to disassociate herself from impending trauma. Above the noise she said defensively:

"There's a note on your desk."

Cordelia tore it open. It was short and explicit. Bernie had always been able to express himself succinctly when he had something to say:

“I’m sorry, partner, they’ve told me it’s cancer and I’m taking the easy way out. I’ve seen what the treatment does to people and I’m not having any. I’ve made my will and it’s with my solicitor. You’ll find his name in the desk. I’ve left the business to you. Everything, including all the equipment. Good luck and thank you.”
Underneath with the inconsiderateness of the doomed he had scribbled a final unfair plea:

“If you find me alive, for God’s sake wait before calling help. I rely on you for this, partner. Bernie.”

She unlocked the door of the inner office and went inside, closing the door carefully behind her.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Joy Hanson:

Book is usually written, printed, or illustrated for everything. You can know everything you want by a publication. Book has a different type. As we know that book is important thing to bring us around the world. Close to that you can your reading skill was fluently. A guide *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman* (Cordelia Gray Mysteries, No. 1) will make you to end up being smarter. You can feel a lot more confidence if you can know about every little thing. But some of you think that will open or reading some sort of book make you bored. It is far from make you fun. Why they can be thought like that? Have you trying to find best book or acceptable book with you?

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With this era which is the greater man or woman or who has ability in doing something more are more

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