

Florida Felonies

Phyllis Smallman's latest

Suspended Sentences

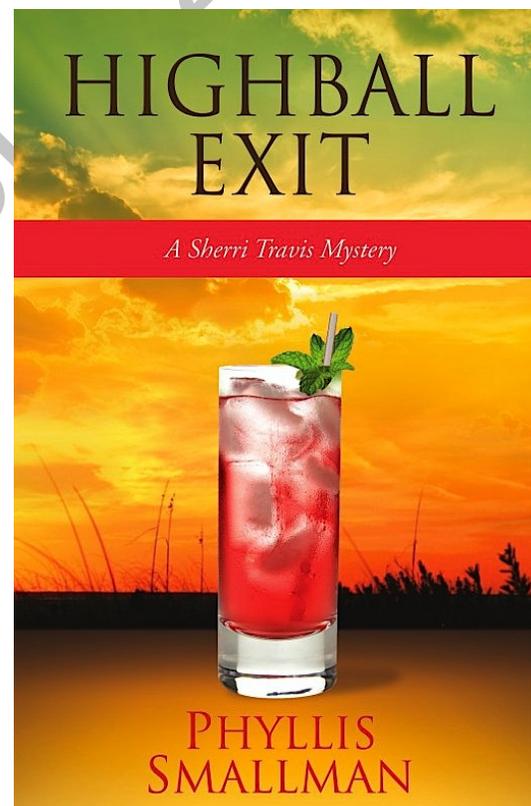
by Jim Napier

Highball Exit is the latest in Phyllis Smallman's engaging series featuring Sherri Travis, the plucky owner of the Sunset Bar and Grill in Jacaranda, Florida. Perennially strapped for cash, Sherri accepts her aunt Key's offer to pay her to look into a friend's death. Holly Mitchell had died of a drug overdose, apparently a suicide. Even more disturbingly, her infant daughter Angel is missing.

From the start things are not adding up. Danny Raines, Holly's nearby neighbour, is a cop, and the person who found the body; yet he didn't identify her, and said he hadn't seen her in over a year. What is he hiding? And Holly's face is covered with bruises. Who beat her, and why? As she explores Holly's last days Sherri's darker discoveries are counter-balanced by revelations in her own life: her father Tully, it seems, has a new lady friend—and it's none other than Sherri's former mother-in-law, Bernice, a woman with whom she shares a deep-seated and mutual dislike.

Holly's life, so full of promise, had plummeted in the months leading to her death, and before she gets to the bottom of things Sherri will be forced

to enter the dark world of escort agencies and drug dealers, and find that her own survival hangs in the balance. And when the law isn't there to handle things, justice must fall into other hands.



***A taut thriller within an
unpredictable odyssey***

There are several accomplished crime writers at work today who base their

stories in Florida, exploring the moral and atmospheric contrast between a glamorous resort culture and the seamy underlife that it often conceals. But among these, the arrival of a new Phyllis Smallman novel is always an event to be savoured. In *Highball Exit* she manages to weave yet another taut thriller into the unpredictable odyssey of her offbeat protagonist

Sherri Travis, and her equally colourful father, Tully. Sherri's commitment to doing the right thing, juxtaposed against the amoral background of the Floridian landscape, is all the more engaging. Smallman's novels are like a decadent desert, with layers of chocolate and whipped cream on top, concealing an unexpected surprise inside. Try one; you'll like them.

Since 2005 Jim Napier's reviews and interviews have appeared in several Canadian newspapers and on such websites as *Spinetingler*, *The Rap Sheet*, *Shots Magazine*, *Crime Time*, *Reviewing The Evidence*, *January* magazine, and *Type M for Murder*, as well as on his own award-winning site, *Deadly Diversions*. He can be reached at jnapier@deadlydiversions.com

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