

# Plenty of Fire

## *Suspended Sentences*

by Jim Napier

There's a marvellous scene halfway through the film *Fried Green Tomatoes* that will resonate with all of us who are of A Certain Age. In a supermarket parking lot, Kathy Bates' character, a middle aged, self-effacing pushover, has finally found a parking space, when two arrogant young women in a Volkswagen Beetle steals it from under her nose. When she complains that she was about to park there, one replies, "Tough. Face it, lady, we're younger and faster."

Bates' character, who has always been on the receiving end of such challenges, ponders the situation and finally decides to take charge of her life: she backs up her large American car, and repeatedly rams it into the much smaller Beetle, inflicting major damage. Horrified, the two young women rush back to their car. The smart-mouthed one says "Are you crazy? What do you think you're doing?!"

Calmly, Bates replies, "Face it, girls, I'm older and have more insurance."

This week's pick – Canadian author Eric Wright's *The Last Hand* – is a similar paean to Senior Power. It is a delightful

affirmation that, although there might be snow on the roof, there can be plenty of fire inside.

### *Eric Wright*

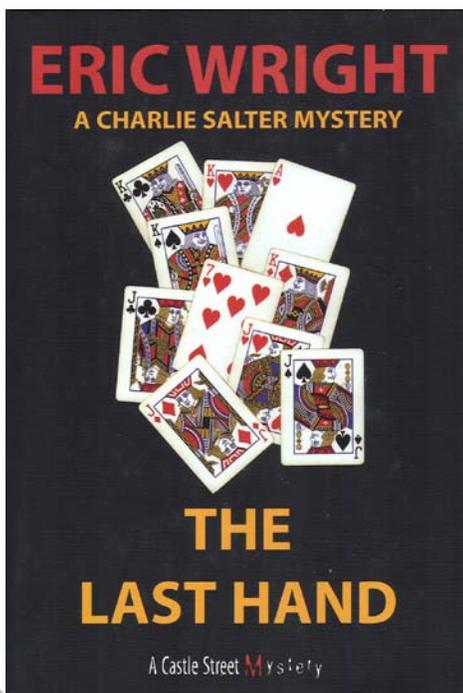
In his long career as a Canadian crime writer, Eric Wright has amassed four Arthur Ellis awards (two for Best Novel, two for best Short Story), an Edgar Award for Best Paperback Original, and the John Creasey Award for the Best First Crime Novel published in England. Born in London, England, Wright emigrated to Canada in his early twenties, and has for many years made his home in Toronto. In 1998 he was awarded the Derrick Murdoch Award

for Lifetime Achievement by the Crime Writers of Canada. He has four distinct series of novels going, the most successful of which by far features Toronto Police inspector Charlie Salter.

### *The Last Hand*

(Castle Street Mysteries/Dundurn Press, 2001)

Charley Salter is feeling his age. Returning from a fishing outing with his son, Seth, he stumbles getting out of the boat, mildly injuring himself. A brief hike up the hill to his cottage leaves him winded. And as an Inspector with the



Toronto Metropolitan Police Charley is facing mandatory retirement at sixty. In the words of an ex-colleague, he is “just counting paperclips until it’s time to go.”

But Charley is not one to go gently into the night, good or otherwise. When he is handed a case, he decides to run with it, wherever it might lead. To be sure, it is an intriguing challenge. A prominent Toronto lawyer, Jeremy Lucas, has been found stabbed to death in his apartment. Salter must reconcile the victim’s reputation as by-all-accounts morally beyond reproach with the fact that a hooker in mini-skirt and silver boots was seen at his doorway shortly before his death. The case is particularly sensitive because his sister, Flora Lucas, is being touted as the next provincial Attorney General, and a fellow lawyer, Calvin Gregson, urges Salter to solve the case quickly and discreetly, before innocent reputations are tarnished. With his assistant in tow, a detective constable recently arrived from Glasgow, the investigation leads Salter on an odyssey that includes a visits to a coterie of the victim’s poker-playing buddies and an investment counsellor serving time in Kingston Penitentiary for defrauding his clients. And there remains, of course, the elusive woman in the silver boots....

### ***Always entertaining***

Eric Wright is one of my favourite Canadian crime writers. His greatest strengths lie not primarily in his plots (which nevertheless are very believable), but in his characters and their relationships, and in his sense of place. Whether he is writing about the busy streets of Toronto or the placid wilderness of Ontario’s provincial parks, his books are always entertaining, and Wright manages to engender amongst his readers a real sense of sympathy for

his protagonist, Charley Salter. If you decide to look at his other works, begin with his first Salter novel, *The Night the Gods Smiled* (1983, and still in print). You cannot do better.

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