



The Gail Force

Robert Lane

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Jake Travis distinguishes himself amongst other dynamic PIs in the genre via his pure zest for life, which often presents with a sensual edge.

In *The Gail Force*, the dangerously dashing Jake Travis is back, drawn into an intricate plot whose moves are dictated by murder and manners. Charm and humor permeate the pages of this surprising thriller by Robert Lane.

Once a soldier, now a PI with honed tastes for the finer things in life, Travis finds himself pulled from his easy Florida days and back into a world of intrigue when a colorful young widow, Riley, turns up on his dock, begging him to avenge her husband's death. Travis, ever driven by his considerable sense of justice, obliges, only to find himself deep in a possible government cover-up and mixed in with a high-stakes blackmail operation. A charming young artist, Christina, tests his ability to play the undercover bad boy part without interruption, while a robust and charming villain, Phillip Agatha, probes his cover story for holes.

While its classic thriller elements—double crosses, death, and unforeseen consequences—propel the novel forward, the gift of *The Gail Force* exists in the appeal of its cast, right down to Agatha, who, even as he rationalizes away the loss of Stalin's many victims, presents as the epitome of practiced class. Travis's love interest, Kathleen, is back, nurturing his conscience and encouraging his mind with her dropped bits of literature and wisdom, while Travis himself proves to be an imminently intelligent force of justice. The trivia dropped, and quips bandied about, expose these characters as both intellectually formidable and lovable.

Travis narrates most of the novel himself, and his brief chapters often end on a satisfied note, with remarks on the fabulous arrogance of cats, or with him marveling over the simple pleasures of a cold beer. He sits smug on solved puzzles and laments missed opportunities with conviction, comfortable and content despite the maelstrom around him. Travis distinguishes himself amongst other dynamic PIs in the genre via his pure zest for life, which often presents with a sensual edge:

There's something about a dirty kiss, one that's not washed in toothpaste and fresh lipstick, but carries the remnants of the day, the grain of the alcohol, the insides of a body. A dirty kiss is a damn good kiss.

The shadowy villain is likely to come into relief for the audience before the key players of the novel take note, exposed by Travis's insights even before he himself understands. This narrative tension, which exists in spite of Travis's intelligence, is achieved by use of the protagonist's continual alcohol—or lobster bisque—haze, a brilliant conceit that makes for amusing and suspenseful reading. He knows good wine, he mouths off beyond reasonable limits, and he triumphs despite his flaws.

The regrets and hopes that characters express, even in dark moments, are human and endearing, and there's little chance that anyone will turn the last page before developing a craving for the next installment. Fortunately, Lane's is a

series that encourages, and rewards, all kinds of hunger. Even as Jake Travis fades back into the Florida sunset, he does so with the certainty that more adventures will come.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (June 16, 2016)

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