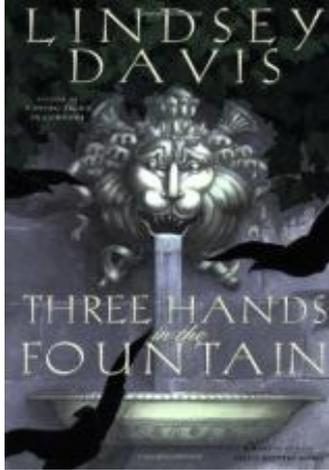


Three Hands in the Fountain

by Lindsey Davis



About the Book

In vino, veritas. But in the water supply of Rome, horror-as Marcus Didius Falco is about to find out. Sharing an ewer of Spanish red with his old friend and new partner Petronius Longus, Falco is on the spot when a man cleaning the local fountain makes a gruesome discovery: a human hand.

Small and evidently female, the hand suggests its owner met a terrifying fate. Naturally, Falco and Petro, formerly of the Vigiles, want to seize on it as their first big case. The officials of Rome, however, prefer to hush up the incident, since a population that riots at the drop of a toga might run wild if body parts are polluting their drinking water.

O tempora! O mores! Soon other delicate, dismembered hands are being found in Rome's two hundred miles of aqueduct. Now aided, inspired, and given critical clues by his wife, Helena, Falco & Partner are ready to buck the status quo and even butt heads with Falco's old boss, Chief Spy Anacrites, to crack the case.

But O, Hades! The duo suspects a serial killer is at large, linked to public festivals, and likely to strike again at the upcoming Roman Games. Even a detective as astute as Falco may not spot a twisted mind in a crowd of 250,000. And if Falco loses this race with time, another pretty victim will make a deadly splash...

Discussion Guide

- 1 From what you have read so far, do you believe Lindsey Davis really is a pawn in the hands of an editor - or anyone?
- 2 Find the topics for discussion in the Q and A section, and discuss them
- 3 Discuss anything else there that you find controversial. Or even interesting.

- 4** What do you imagine the hypothetical author Mimsy Bloggins to be like? Do you think you would enjoy her books?
- 5** Falco was derived initially as a classic genre 'private eye'. What are the criteria for this, and in what ways - in his character and situation - does he meet or depart from them?
- 6** He is now attempting to work with a partner, Petronius Longus. How does this relate to his existing partnership with Helena, and what does the failure of the two old cronies to work together tell us about friendship? There will be different partners in succeeding books. Who do you think the author will choose? (NB the third one in fact turned out not to be the person she had intended!)
- 7** The squad of vigiles, first introduced in detail in *'Time to Depart'* are used like the ensemble characters in a 'police procedural' crime novel. Our lack of knowledge of Roman police procedure creates obvious difficulties, but which elements of modern *policier* crime novels do translate here?
- 8** Although it is not necessary to know this, the character Julius Frontinus was a historical figure. What do you think it adds if you are told that he was a governor of Roman Britain (does it add more for British readers than for Americans?) and that he wrote a famous Latin treatise on aqueducts? How do you feel about the use of 'real' people in historical novels?
- 9** When the series began, Falco was a rather disreputable character, in his own mind at least a fabulous seducer of women, whereas Petronius occupied the standard position of hard-working official policeman, a good family man too. How has this now developed, and where do you feel it will end for them both?
- 10** People sometimes say 'A Roman girl of good family would not behave as Helena has done'. The author replies that there is an example in Juvenal of a senator's wife who ran off with a gladiator - and an elderly beaten-up gladiator at that. She believes that there have always been spirited girls who did as they liked. True? Likely? Is it acceptable to say that what never changes in history is human nature?
- 11** By accident the first book was written in the first person because it seemed traditional. What are the advantages and disadvantages? Are there any particular problems in developing the story in a crime novel? What about the pros and cons of perpetual direct speech in a narrative?
- 11a** Given that most ordinary Romans probably did not speak like Cicero, and that even Cicero probably did not speak like his speeches in private, consider how an author can satisfy those who want their historical characters to sound Really Classical, while also achieving pace, liveliness, conviction, and wit for those who are less pedantic?
- 12** How can a woman write as a man? Why can't most men write about women at all, let alone in the first person? Whatever happened to simple observation?
- 13** Discuss the recurrent theme of organisational politics.
- 14** (If question 13 is answered fully, there will be no time for any others!)

Author Bio

Lindsey Davis was born and raised in Birmingham, England. After taking an English degree at Oxford and working for the civil service for 13 years, she "ran away to be a writer." Her internationally bestselling novels featuring ancient Roman detective Marcus Didius Falco include VENUS IN COOPER, THE IRON HAND OF MARS, NEMESIS and ALEXANDRIA. She is also the author of REBELS AND TRAITORS, set during the English Civil War. Davis is the recipient of the Crime Writers' Association Cartier Diamond Dagger Award, the highest accolade for crime writers, as well as the Ellis Peters Historical Dagger Award and the Authors' Club Best First Novel award.

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