Outlandish Behavior

Agatha Christie’s ghost appears in drag

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I submitted my first book to Berkley Prime Crime Books, and I didn’t hear from them for over a year,” Orland Outland says. “When they finally called to offer me a contract, my response was, ‘Thanks very much—I’m already dead.’”

This was 1994, before protease inhibitors appeared on the AIDS landscape but long after Outland’s 1991 HIV diagnosis. “Everyone I knew was either dead or dying,” says Outland, whose downhill slide to near-death sped up when he lost his closest friend, Clint. Outland’s mother flew in from Reno, Nevada—“She literally saved my life,” he says—and brought good luck with her: His first book sold while she was nursing him back to health in San Francisco.

Dedicated to Outland’s mother, *Death Wore a Smart Little Outfit* was published last year, the first of a series that features a drag-queen detective. Number two, *Death Wore a Fabulous New Fragrance,* hits the stores this month.

Meanwhile, his satirical self-help book, *The Principles: The Gay Man’s Guide to Getting (and Keeping) a Man* (a twist on *The Rules*), is becoming a gay bestseller.

As for the author’s romantic status, “I’ve been single all my life,” he says, though he’s unsure how to characterize his friendship with Clint, to whom *The Principles* is dedicated. “I guess we were significant others in the Lucy and Ethel sense.”

The success of his ritonavir/saquinavir/d4T/ delavirdine combo has had an unexpected side effect: “My health is good and my thoughts have turned to romance,” says Outland, 35.

Sounds like good grist for his next novel. “It’s about a man with AIDS who goes on protease inhibitors, and all the second-chance complications that arise.” This one is clearly autobiographical. “A bunch of credit card bills came in the mail when I was sick, and I thought, ‘Well, I won’t have to worry about paying these off!’” Outland says. “I’ve spent the last two years eating those words.”

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