

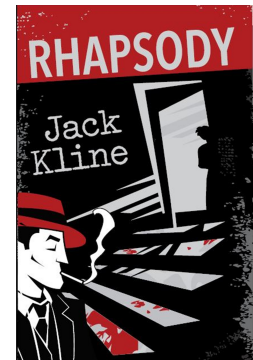
12. *Rhapsody*

November 24, 2020

It's the second book in the Philip Morris, private eye, series by late-bloomer prodigy Jack Kline. In Phil's first big case, captured in *But Not for Me*¹—for titles Kline likes suggestive tunes of the times (1930s, Kansas City)—Phil builds his business on an investigation into the missing son of city machine kingpin Tom Holloway. Holloway also has a beautiful daughter who proves to be something of a siren... and a quandary for the struggling-to-make-his-mark, yet thoughtfully confident, Mr. Morris.

Plenty of interplay with local Sicilian and Irish mob figures and assorted henchmen strongly suggesting that Phil look into other things. On the side, we get to be there for a prize fight, with a blow-by-blow account that puts you at ring side. At the end of it all, there's a showdown that leaves Phil with some wounds to body and psyche, and a mixed reputation about town. One thing, he's an excellent shot... even with a couple of 'shots' in him.

Rhapsody starts out lyrically. The second big case shows twists and turns from the gitgo—the case itself (we even have a house that many think is inhabited by ghosts), who is he, where's his love life going, why's he falling off the wagon after months of abstinence motivated by Case 1? From the *Rhapsody* back cover:



In 1935, Kansas City detective Phil Morris receives a call from candy heiress Cynthia Stuart. She claims Millbrook Chocolates, her dead father's business, is hemorrhaging money. In addition, tenants leasing her childhood home believe the old Stuart house is haunted. Cynthia wants Phil and his team to investigate the loss of company funds and odd occurrences at her former home.

[After her parents were tragically murdered ten years earlier, the police decided Cynthia's teenage brother killed them and then turned the murder weapon on himself.] "And one more thing," Cynthia tells Phil: "There is no way my brother killed my parents and then himself... I'll never believe anything else."

As Phil and his team slog through the intertwined matters of closed-case murders, a failing business, and a haunted house, his problems are confounded by a distracting dilemma in his love life. Danger escalates, and though Phil doesn't believe in ghosts, the possibility of supernatural answers looms ever larger.

On a personal level, it took me a few chapters to get into the pace of the story after the intensity of *But Not for Me*. But by the fifth and sixth I picked up the beat as the tapestry of relationships unfolds in the hands of master raconteur, Big Jack. It's a long, not-quite-leisurely ride, with complex, mostly sympathetic (and a couple of good-odd) characters and a handful of dedicated bad guys.

Fans will be happy to know that the ensemble of supporting cast is gelling, too—Phil's Girl Friday and subconscious heart throb Jill Freely, good-humored sidekick Rusty Callahan (now a partner), Police Chief Myers, *Kansas City Star* editor Dominic Goucher, Morris' landlady Lucille, Sally the tongue-love-you German Shepherd, and even Henry the elevator operator. Kline breathes a special warmth into all his regulars.

The bodacious romantic interest? You bet. (Now a trademark?) This one is named Virginia. She's got "take home to mama" written all over her; plus, she loves Phil and Sally, and can throw a baseball with the zip of a minor-league pitcher. A keeper, just as is the new book, both looking fabulous in Christmas stockings.

¹ Jack's other works are exceptional reads as well, in sequence, *Blowing Carbon* (2009), *But Not for Me* (2017), and for another holiday-fit gem, *Christmas Branches* (2019). Search for reviews on my thecoffeecoaster.com.