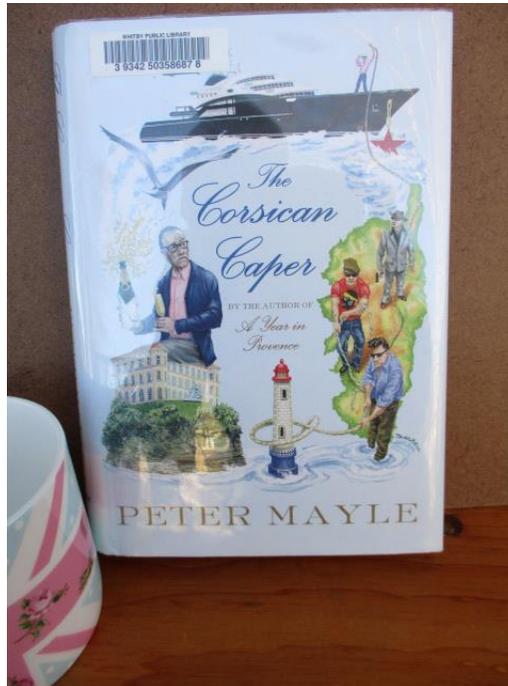


The Corsican Caper

By Rod Fraser



IT WAS JUST a couple of days ago when I walked to the library to find something to read for the weekend. I thought a nice novel might do the trick, so I proceeded to the fiction section and picked *The Corsican Caper* off the shelf.

I hadn't heard of the author before, but it was a short book (just 160 pages), nicely laid out with an

easy to read typeface and lots of white space. Just perfect, I thought, after reading the plot summary on the dust jacket. A good mystery to read over the next few days.

Peter Mayle, the author of *The Corsican Capers*, wrote over thirty-five books. *A Year in Provence*, a memoir of his first year living in France, was his most successful. It was later made into a television mini-series starring John Thaw and Lindsay Duncan.

Reviewers liked the book. One wrote, it had an “honest style, wit and a refreshing bit of humour.” The public liked it as well. It sold 5 million copies.

Mayle died early in 2018 at the age of 78. His publisher, Alfred A. Knopf, announced his death, but the cause was not disclosed.

Peter Mayle spent many of his working years in advertising, but at age 47, he left England for the south of France, hoping to support himself by writing magazine articles, while working on a novel.

It soon became clear his publisher was more interested in Mayle’s amusing anecdotes about everyday village life in Provence and the trials of renovating a 200-year-old stone farmhouse. The novel was set aside and Mayle worked on the manuscript for what would become *A Year in Provence*.

MAYLE ALSO WROTE a series of four mystery novels, set in the Mediterranean, of which *The Corsican Caper* is a good example. Sam Levitt is the sleuth in charge. The story is enjoyable light reading, with a decent plot and all the glamour, good food and wine of Southern France thrown in for good measure.

The story revolves around Francis Reboul, a rich Frenchman living in Marseille in a lovely coastal estate. He is awaiting vacationing friends, Sam Levitt, and his lovely girlfriend, Elena Morales.

During this time, a Russian Oligarch, Olef Vronsky, takes an interest in Reboul's property and offers to buy it. When he is told it is not for sale at any price, Vronsky becomes persistent and threatening. It seems he is not a man to be trifled with.

In the past—as Francis, Sam and Elena find out—a number of Vronsky's business partners died in mysterious circumstances, and always when Vronsky was far away from the murder scene with an ironclad alibi. Although Vronsky's involvement was suspected in all these deaths, there was never sufficient evidence to charge him with any of the crimes.

The question now facing Francis, Sam and Elena is this: is it likely Vronsky would arrange the murder of Reboul merely to purchase his lovely home? Sam and Elena are sufficiently concerned to investigate

Kronsky's background, his business dealings and underworld connections.

Kronsky has no idea that his intended victim and his friends suspect his sinister intentions. He hires two underworld characters to handle the 'accident' he has planned for Reboul. They hope to lure Reboul to a remote part of Corsica, murder him and dispose of his body.

Fortunately for Reboul, Sam and Elena find out about Vronsky's plot through their own connections and put a plan in place to catch the murderers in the act. They want Vronsky charged with conspiracy to murder Reboul and their plan is intended to do just that.

SOME REVIEWERS HAVE complained the plot in this book is a little thin. Perhaps so. But after having read a number of murder mysteries over the years, where far too many characters are introduced in the first chapter, this novel is a refreshing change.

I didn't have to work out which suspect is likely to be a murderer. I didn't have to remember a multitude of shady characters. Mayle kept it simple.

The key people in the novel are limited to four or five. We learn early on who is likely to be the bad guy and what he might be capable of doing. Mayle's skill is in taking a 'thin plot' and making it into a

wonderful story. And it doesn't hurt to learn how the wealthy people in the south of France live and enjoy their lives.

Those who like this book review should read *Retiring in France*, another article on this blog. Who knows? You might write a best-selling memoir and want to spend the rest of your days in sunny, southern France.

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