

A Death in Belmont (P.S.)

By Sebastian Junger

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From the acclaimed author of *A Perfect Storm* comes a powerful chronicle of three lives that collide in the vortex of one of America's most controversial serial murder cases.

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
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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Imagine how strange and frightening it would be to see a picture of yourself, not quite a year old, with your mother and two men, one of whom is a confessed serial killer. This is what happened to Sebastian Junger, and only a small part of what he recounts in *A Death in Belmont*.

The quiet suburb of Belmont, Massachusetts, is in the grip of fear. The Boston Strangler murders have taken place nearby, and now there is another shocking sex crime, right in Belmont. The victim is Bessie Goldberg, a middle-aged woman who had hired a cleaning man to help out around the house on that fall day in 1963. He is a black man named Roy Smith. He did the appointed chores, collected his money and left a receipt on the kitchen table. Neighbors will say that he looked furtive when he walked down the street, that he was in a hurry, that he stopped to buy cigarettes, that he looked over his shoulder. They didn't see a black man in Belmont very often, so, of course, they noticed him. So the story went, and on these slender threads, and his own checkered history, Roy Smith is convicted of the Belmont murder and sent to prison.

On the day of the murder, Albert DeSalvo, an Italian-American handyman, is also in Belmont, working as a carpenter in the Junger home, where the picture is taken. Two years after his work for the Jungers, he confesses in vivid detail to the crimes of which the Boston Strangler is accused, and sent to prison, where he is stabbed to death by an inmate. But he never confesses to the Bessie Goldberg murder. Could he have left the Junger home, committed the murder a few blocks away and calmly returned to finish his day's work? Could Roy Smith really have been the guilty party, even though his sentence was commuted after De Salvo confessed?

In the grand tradition of his bestselling *The Perfect Storm*, Junger tells a terrific story, lining up all the elements, asking all the pertinent questions, digging into the backgrounds of both men, retelling his mother's very strange encounter with Albert when she is home alone with Sebastian. He then asks the larger questions: Was Roy Smith convicted summarily because he was black? Was Albert De Salvo really the Boston Strangler?

Junger cannot answer all the questions, as no one can. Without DNA, there is no way to be certain of which of the two men might have committed the rape and murder of Bessie Goldberg, or if neither of them is guilty. While it is frustrating not to know for sure, the story is fascinating, reads like a tautly plotted mystery thriller, and Junger's close connection is downright creepy. --Valerie Ryan

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. Bessie Goldberg was strangled to death in her home in Belmont, a Boston suburb, in March of 1963—right in the middle of the Boston Strangler's killing spree. Her death has not usually been associated with the other Strangler killings because Roy Smith, a black man who was working in Goldberg's house that day, was convicted of her murder on strong circumstantial evidence. But another man was working in Belmont that day: Albert DeSalvo, who later confessed to being the Boston Strangler, was doing construction work in the home of Junger's parents (the author himself was a baby). Could DeSalvo have slipped away and killed Bessie Goldberg? Junger's taut narrative makes dizzying hairpin turns as he considers all the evidence for, and against, Smith or DeSalvo being Goldberg's killer; he also reviews the more familiar case for and against DeSalvo being the Strangler—for there are serious questions about his confession. As Junger showed in his bestselling *The Perfect Storm*, he's a hell of a storyteller, and here he intertwines underlying moral quandaries—was racism a factor in Smith's conviction? How to judge when the

truth in this case is probably unknowable?—with the tales of two men: Smith, a ne'er-do-well from a racist South who rehabilitated himself before dying in prison; DeSalvo, a sexual predator raised by a violent father who was stabbed to death in prison. This perplexing story gains an extra degree of creepiness from Junger's personal connection to it. *First serial to Vanity Fair; 19-city author tour. (May 1)*

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From [Bookmarks Magazine](#)

Junger follows up his best-selling *A Perfect Storm* (1997) and *Fire* (2001), a collection of magazine pieces, with a book positing that his own mother was fortunate to have escaped Albert DeSalvo with her life. Few critics contest Junger's talent as a storyteller, his eye for engaging detail, and the irresistible hook. His latest effort makes the most of the connection between his family and DeSalvo, though it struggles to recreate the immediacy and shattering suspense that characterize his earlier work. The author's search for truth, no matter how close to home, yields to the passing of time. Questions unanswered for four decades remain shrouded in history.

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Marguerite Boutte:

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