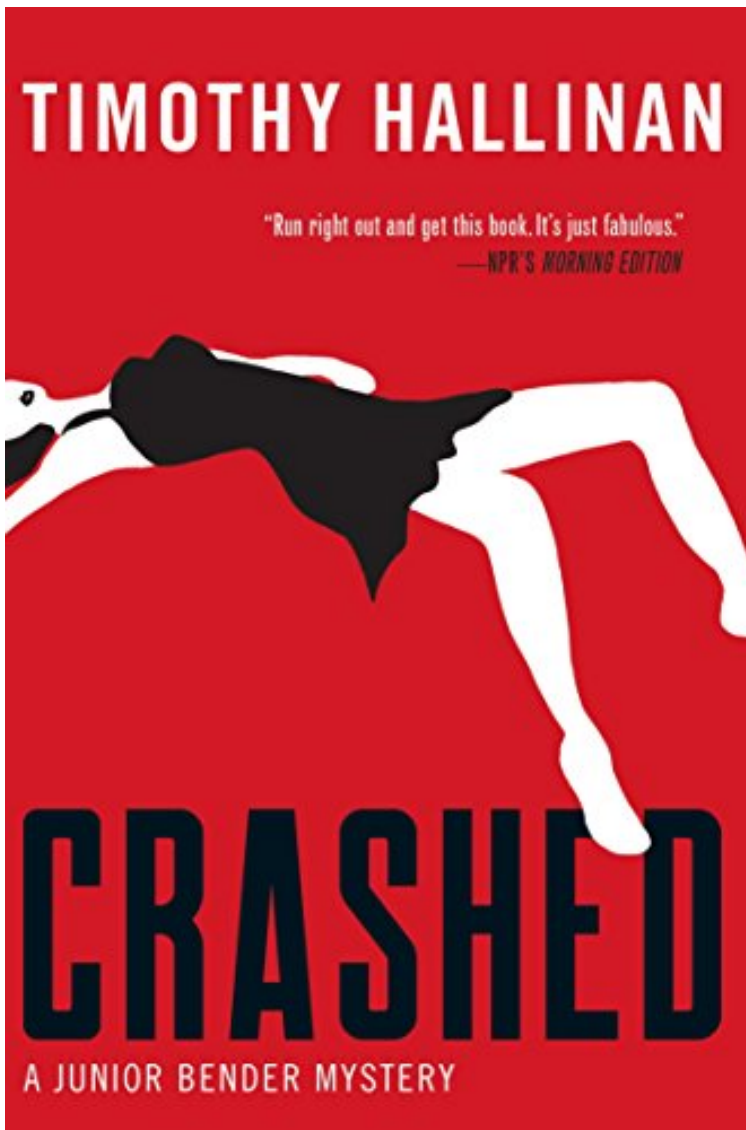


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Crashed



Par Timothy Hallinan
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurQuick-talking burglar Junior Bender gets blackmailed into starting a new career as a private investigator for crooks in this hilarious Hollywood mysteryJunior Bender, a burglar with a magic touch, is being blackmailed into taking on a new freelance job. One of LAs biggest crime bosses is producing a porn movie that someone keeps sabotaging; Juniors job is to figure out whos responsible and keep the movie on track.The trouble is, hes not sure he can go through with the job, blackmail or no blackmail. The actress lined up to star in the film, Thistle Downing, is an ex-child star who now lives alone in a drug-induced stupor, destitute and uninsurable. This movie would be scandalous fodder for tabloids around the country. Junior knows what he should doget Thistle out and find her some helpbut doing the right thing will land him on the wrong side of some scary people.From the Hardcover edition.ExtraitIf Id liked

expressionism, I might have been okay. But the expressionists dont do anything for me, dont even make my palms itch. And Klee especially doesnt do anything for me. My education, spotty as it was, pretty much set my ArtClock to the fifteenth century in the Low Countries. If it had been Memling or Van der Weyden, one of the mystical Flemish masters shedding Gods Dutch light on some lily-filled annunciation, I would have been looking at the picture when I took it off the wall. As it was, I was looking at the wall. So I saw it, something I hadnt been told would be there. Just a hairline crack in the drywall, perfectly circular, maybe the size of a dinner plate. Seen from the side, by someone peeking behind the painting without moving it, which is what most thieves would do in this sadly mistrustful age of art alarms, it would have been invisible. But I had taken the picture down, and there it was. And I'm weak. I think for everyone in the world, theres something you could dangle in front of them, something they would run onto a freeway at rush hour to get. When I meet somebody, I like to try to figure out what that is for that person. You for diamonds, darling, or first editions of Dickens? Jimmy Choo shoes or a Joseph Cornell box? And you, mister, a thick stack of green? A troop of Balinese girl scouts? A Maserati with your monogram on it? For me, its a wall safe. From my somewhat specialized perspective, a wall safe is the perfect object. To you, it may be a hole in the wall with a door on it. To me, its one hundred percent potential. Theres absolutely no way to know whats in there. You can only be sure of one thing: Whatever it is, it means a hell of a lot to somebody. Maybe its what theyd run into traffic for. A wall safe is just a question mark. With an answer inside. Janice hadnt told me there would be a safe behind the picture. We had discussed everything but that. And, of course, that meaning the thing I hadnt anticipated was what screwed me. What Janice and I had mostly talked about was the front door. Think baronial, shed said with a half-smile. Janice had the half-smile down cold. The front windows are seven feet from the ground. Youd need a ladder just to say hi. How far from the front door to the curb? The bar we were in was way south of the Boulevard, in Reseda, far enough south that we were the only people in the place who were speaking English, and Serenas Greatest Hits was on permanent loop. The air was ripe with cilantro and cumin, and the place was mercifully lacking in ferns and sports memorabilia. A single wide-screen television, ignored by all, broadcast the soccer game. I am personally convinced that only one soccer game has ever actually been played, and they show it over and over again from different camera angles. As always, Janice had chosen the bar. With Janice in charge of the compass, it was possible to experience an entire planet worth of bars without ever leaving the San Fernando Valley. The last one we had met in had been Lao, with snacks of crisp fish bits and an extensive lineup of obscure tropical beers. Seventy-three feet, nine inches. She broke off the tip of a tortilla chip and put it near her mouth. Theres a black slate walk that kind of curves up to it. I was nursing a Negra Modelo, the king of Hispanic dark beers, and watching the chip, calculating the odds against her actually eating it. Is the door visible from the street? Its so completely visible, shed said, that if you were a kid in one of those 40s musicals and you decided to put on a show, the front door of the Huston house is where youd put it on. Makes the back sound good, I said. As warm with rottweilers. She sat back, the jet necklace ather throat sparkling wickedly and the overhead lights flashing off the rectangular, black-framed glasses she wore in order to look like a businesswoman but which actually made her look like a beautiful girl wearing glasses. Burglars, of which I am one, dont like Rottweilers. But theyre not in the house, right? Tell me theyre not in the house. They are not. One of them pooped on the Missus ninety thousand-dollar Kirghiz rug. Janice powdered the bit of chip between her fingers and let it fall to her napkin. Or I should say, one of the Missus ninety thousand-dollar Kirghiz rugs. There are several women called Missus? I asked. Or several rugs? Either way, Janice said, reproachfully straightening her glasses at me. The dogs are kept in back, and they get fed like every other Friday. Meaning no going in through the back, I said. Not unless you want to be kibble, Janice said. Or the side, either. The wall around the yard is flush with the front wall of the house. Speaking of kibble. Please do, Janice said. I so rarely get a chance to. Does anyone drop by to feed the beasts? Am I likely to run into No one in his right mind would go into that yard. The only way to feed them would be to throw a bison over the walls. The Hustons have a very fancy apparatus, looks like it was built for the space shuttle. Delivers precise amounts of ravening beast food twice a day. So theyre strong and healthy and the old killer instinct doesnt dim. So, I said. Its the front door. She used the tip of her index finger to slide her glasses down to the point of her perfect nose, and looked at me over them. Afraid so. I drained my beer and signaled for another. Janice took a demure sip of her tonic and lime. I said, I hate front doors. Im going to stand there for fifteen minutes, trying to pick a lock in plain sight. Thats why we came to you, she said. Mr. Ingenuity. You came to me, I said, because you know this is the week I pay my child support. Janice was a back-and-forth, working for three or four brokers, guys with clients who knew where things were and wanted those things, but werent

sufficiently hands-on to grab them for themselves. She used me before, and it had worked out okay. She didn't know I'd backtracked her to two of her employers. One of them, an international-grade fence called Stinky Tetweiler, weighed 300 hard-earned pounds and lived in a long, lowhouse south of the Boulevard with an ever-changing number of very young Filipino men with very small waists. Like a lot of the bigger houses south of Ventura, Stinky's place had once belonged to a movie star, back when the Valley was movie-starter territory. In the case of Stinky's house, the star was Alan Ladd, although Stinky had rebuilt the house into a sort of collision between tetrahedrons that would have had old Alan's ghost, had he dropped by, looking for the front door. Janice's other client, known to the trade only as Wattle, worked out of an actual office, with a desk and everything, in a smoked-glass high-rise on Ventura near the 405 Freeway. His company was listed on the building directory as Wattle Inc. Wattle himself was a guy who had looked for years like he would die in minutes. He was extremely short, with a belly that suggested an open umbrella, a drinker's face the color of rare roast beef, and a game leg that he dragged around like an anchor. I'd hooked onto his back bumper one night and followed him up into Benedict Canyon until he slowed the car to allow a massive pair of wrought-iron gates to swing open, then took a steep driveway up into the pepper trees. But Janice wasn't aware I knew any of this. And if she had been, she wouldn't have been amused at all. Where's the streetlight? She gave me her bad-news smile, brave and full of fraudulent compassion. Right in front. More or less directly over the end of the sidewalk. Illuminating the front door. Brilliantly, she said. Don't think about the front door. Think about what's on the other side. I am, I said. I'm thinking I have to carry it seventy-three feet and nine inches to the van. Under a streetlight. You always focus on the negative, she said. You need to do something about that. You want your positive energy to flow straight and true, and every time you go to the negative, you put up a little barrier. If it weren't for your constant focus on negative energy, your marriage might have gone better. God, the things women think they have the right to say. My marriage went fine, I said. It was before the marriage went that was difficult. You have to be positive about that, too, she said. Without the marriage, you wouldn't have Rina. Ahh, Rina, twelve years old and the light of my life. To the extent I have her, anyway. She gave me the slow nod women use to indicate that they understand our pain, they admire the courage with which we handle it, and they're absolutely certain that it's all our fault. I know it's tough, Kathy being so punitive with visitation. But she's your daughter. You've got to be happy about that.

Janice put down her glass and patted me comfortingly on the wrist with wet, cold fingers. I resisted the impulse to pull my wrist away. After all, her hand would dry eventually. She was working her way toward flirting, as she did every time we met, even though we both knew it wouldn't lead anywhere. I was still attached to Kathy, my former wife, and Janice demonstrated no awkwardness or any other kind of perceptible difficulty turning down dates. Of course, I'm happy about that, I said. And then, because it was expected, I made the usual move. Want to go to dinner? She lowered her head slightly and regarded me from beneath her spiky bangs. Tell me the truth. When you thought about asking me that question, you anticipated a negative response, didn't you? Absolutely, I said. It's the ninth time, and you've never said yes. See what I mean? she said. Your negativity has put kinks in your energy flow. Can you straighten it for me? If your invitation had been made in a purely affirmative spirit, I might have said yes. Might? I took a pull off the beer. You mean I could purify my spirit, straighten out my energy flow, sterilize my anticipations, and you still might say no? Oh, Junior, she said. There are so many intangibles. Name one. The slow head-shake again. You're a crook. So are you. I beg to differ, she said. I'm a facilitator. I bring together different kinds of energies to effect the transfer of physical objects. It's almost metaphysical. She held her hands above the table so her palms were about four inches apart, as though she expected electricity to flow between them. She turned them so the left hand was on top. On one side, she said, the energy of desire: dark, intense, magnetic. She reversed her hands so the right was on top. On the other side, the energy of action: direct, kinetic, daring. Whooo, I said. That's me? Certainly. Sounds like somebody I'd go out with. And don't think I don't want to, she said, and she narrowed her eyes mystically, which made her look nearsighted. I've always loved nearsighted women. They're so easy to help. Some day the elements will be in alignment. She pushed the glass away and got up, and guys all over the place turned to look. In this bar, Janice was as exotic as an orchid blooming in the snow. A brightly lighted front door, I said, mostly to slow her down. I liked watching her leave almost as much as I liked watching her arrive. Seventy-three feet to the curb. Carrying that damn thing. And nine inches. Seventy-three feet, nine inches. In both directions. And you have to solve it by Monday, she said. But don't worry. You'll think of something. You always do. When the child supports due. She gave me a little four-finger wiggle of farewell, turned, and headed for the door. Every eye in the place was on her backside. That may be dated, but it was true. And, of course, I had thought of something. In the abstract the plan had seemed

plausible. Sort of. And it had continued to seem plausible right up to the moment I pulled up in front of the house in broad daylight. Then, as I climbed out, wincing into the merciless July sun that dehydrates the San Fernando Valley annually, it seemed very much less plausible. I felt a rush of what Janice would undoubtedly call negative energy, and suddenly it seemed completely idiotic. But this was not the time to improvise. It was Monday afternoon in an upscale neighborhood, and I needed to justify my presence. Sweating in my dark coveralls, I went around to the back of the van and opened the rear door. Out of it I pulled a heavy dolly, which I set down about two feet behind the rear bumper. I squared my shoulders, the picture of someone about to do something difficult, leaned in, and very slowly dragged out an enormous cardboard refrigerator carton, on one side of which I had stenciled the words SUB ZERO. This was no neighborhood for Kelvinators or Maytags. Back behind the house, the dogs began to bark. They were all bassos, ready to sing the lead in Boris Godunov, and I thought I could distinguish four of them, sounding like they weighed a combined total of 750 pounds, mostly teeth. Christ, I was seventy-three feet, nine inches from the door, not even standing on the damn lawn yet, and I was already too close for them. Kathy, my ex-wife, has taught Rina to love dogs. It doesn't matter how obscure the opportunity for revenge is; Kathy will grab it like a trapeze. Grunting and straining, I tilted the box down and slid it onto the dolly. I'd put a couple of sandbags in the bottom of the box, mostly to keep it from tipping or being blown over, but it took some work to make it look heavy enough. Once I had it on the dolly, I tilted it back and made a big production of hauling it up the four-inch vertical of the curb. Then I walked away from it so I was visible from all directions, pulled out a cell phone, and called myself. I listened to my message for a second and then talked into the phone. With it pressed to my ear, I turned to face the house, looked up at a second-story window, and gave a little wave. The cell phone slipped easily into the top pocket of the coveralls, and I grabbed the dolly handles, put my back into tilting it up onto the wheels, and towed the carton up the slate path. At the door, I positioned the box so the side with SUB ZERO on it faced the street. Then I got in between the box and the door and pushed open the flap I'd cut in the closest side of the box just three straight lines with a box cutter, leaving the fourth side of the rectangle intact to serve as a hinge. The flap was about five feet high and three feet wide, and it swung open into the box. I climbed in. From the street, all anyone would see was the box. The door was fancy, not functional. Heavy dark wood, brass hardware, and a big panel of stained glass in the upper half, some sort of coat of arms, a characteristically confused collision of symbolic elements that included an ax, a rose, and something that looked suspiciously like a pair of pliers. A good graphic artist could have made a fortune in the Middle Ages. My working valise was at the bottom of the box. I snapped on a pair of surgical gloves, pulled out my set of picks, and went to work on the lock. The temperature in the box was about a hundred degrees, the gloves quickly became wet inside, and appearances to the contrary the lock had muscles. But I didn't feel cramped for time, since I doubted anyone would suspect a Sub Zero refrigerator of trying to break into a house. After nine or ten warm, damp minutes, the lock did a tickled little shimmy and then began to give up its secrets. I dropped the final pin, tested the knob, and put on a bathing cap to cover my hair. Then I climbed out of the box, opened the door, and stepped inside. I read continually about burglars who experience some sort of deep, even sexual pleasure at the moment of entry, as though the house were a long-desired body to which they had finally gained access. For me, a house is an inconvenience. It's a bunch of walls surrounding something I want. In order to get what I want, I have to put myself inside the walls, and then get out as fast as I can. I figure that the risk of being caught increases by about five percent each minute once you get beyond four minutes. Anybody who stays inside longer than twenty to twenty-five minutes deserves a free ride in the back of a black-and-white. The alarm was exactly where Janice said it would be, blinking frantically just around the corner from the front door, and the code she gave me calmed it right down. The dogs were going nuts in the back, but that was where they seemed to be staying. I gave it a count of ten with one foot figuratively outside the door just to make sure, but all they did was bark and howl and scabble with their toenails at a glass door somewhere on the far side of the house.

When I was certain none of them was toting his fangs from room to room inside, I went back out onto the porch, used the dolly to tilt the carton, and wheeled it inside. Then I closed the door. Getting in is more than half of it; in fact, I figure that a safe entry is about sixty percent of the work. Finding what you want will burn up another twenty to thirty percent, and getting out is pretty much a snap. Usually. The house was a temple of gleam. Entire quarries in Italy had been strip-mined to pave the floors, and many young Italian craftspersons had probably died of dust inhalation to bring the stone to this pitch of polish. I was in a circular grand entry hall, maybe thirty-five feet high, dominated by a massive chandelier in what might have been Swarovski crystal, dangling by a heavy golden chain. To the right was a circular stair curving up the

wall of the hall, with a teak banister that had been sanded, polished, stained, polished, varnished, polished, and varnished again. Not for the first time, I asked myself what Mr. and/or Mrs. Huston did for a living. Despite the museum-like grandeur of the entry, there was a homely smell that took me back years and years, to my grandmother's house. I needed a second to identify it as camphor, the active ingredient in mothballs. We don't use mothballs so much any more, maybe because we have fewer natural fabrics, but they were being used here. The odor suggested a certain strained fussiness, not an attitude that would be comfortable with Rottweilers leaving piles on the rugs. The camphor seemed to come from my right, where a set of steps led up to the living room, so perhaps the mothballs were intended to protect the carpets. Straight ahead, a set of five steps led up to the rest of the first floor, accounting for the high front windows. The piece I had been sent for was all the way upstairs, in what Janice had described as the marital theme park. As I climbed the curving stairway, the dogs reached a new pitch of frenzy, and I began to think about accelerating the process. Some neighbor might get pissed off and call the cops, and the cops, in turn, might wonder why the Fidos were so manic. I took the stairs two at a time. The master bedroom was bigger than Versailles. Three things about its occupants were immediately obvious. First, they were sexually adventurous and willing to pay for it. The ceiling was mirrored, the bedspread was some sort of black fur, a shelf recessed in the wall above the head of the bed held a garish assortment of toys, lubricants, and, for all I could tell, hors d'oeuvres. There were at least a dozen little bottles of amyl nitrate under different brand names, and a crystal bowl of white powder on a mirror, with a razor gleaming beside it. Over against one wall was an actual gynecologist's table. The stirrup had sequins on them. The second thing that was apparent was that they both thought Mrs. Huston was a knockout. There were at least a dozen large color photos of her, blond, a little over-vibrant, and seriously under-dressed, along the wall to the right of the bed. She didn't look like someone who puts mothballs on her carpets, if only because they'd aggravate carpet burn. Of course, it was an assumption that the woman wearing, in some of the pictures, no more than a coat of baby oil, was Mrs. Huston, but if she wasn't, the relationship was even stranger than the bedroom would suggest. The odd energy she was projecting in some of the pictures might have owed something to the bowl of white powder on the shelf. Even without the energy, even without the baby oil, she had a kind of raw, slightly crude appeal that probably interested men whose tastes were coarser than mine. The third obvious thing was that while they might have been unanimous in their admiration of Mrs. Huston, they had very different tastes in art. On the far wall were five, count them if you can bear to look at them long enough, five of those flesh-puckering big-eyed children painted in the 1950s by Mr. Keane or Mrs. Keane: waifs of the chilly dawn with dreadful days awaiting them, days they will meet with eyes as big as doorknobs, but not as expressive. It had always amazed me that Mr. and Mrs. Keane went to court to establish which of them was responsible for these remorseless reiterations of elementary-school bathos. If I'd been the judge, I'd have yanked their artistic licenses in perpetuity and sentenced them to a lifetime twelve-step program in which all twelve steps consisted of spending fourteen hours a day watching real children through a foot-thick pane of glass. By contrast, on the wall directly opposite the door was the Paul Klee painting that was the object of Janice's clients' lust. Even at this distance, I hated it, although not as much as I hated the Keanes. Full of thin angular shapes and flat 1950s colors that looked like they were inspired by Formica, it looked to me like something painted with a coat hanger. Klee despised color in his early career, so I didn't feel so bad about despising the ones he'd used here. I looked back at the Keanes, thinking that when I came back to the Klee I'd like it better through sheer contrast, but it didn't work. It still looked like a watchspring's daydream. Now that I was all the way inside the room, I saw a small surprise on the wall into which the door was set: another Klee, this one smaller and maybe, just marginally, not as ugly. I'd been told only about the one for some reason, and I wasted a brief moment wondering whether to bag both of them, then rejected the thought. I was in no position to fence a Klee. Fine art fencing was a specialty, and a perilously risky specialty at that. I'd take the one I'd been sent to take, and let my employer worry about handing it off to someone. The room was bright with the sun banging on the big windows, the light filtered white through semi-opaque curtains of a gandy or something diaphanous. The bed was to the left, and beyond it was an open door. I slogged my way across a carpet about five inches deep and checked out the door. It led to a sort of sitting room, all mirrored, with a makeup table big enough for the Rockettes on one wall. Beyond that yawned an enormous bathroom. The bathroom, in turn, had two doors leading off it, one into a chamber built just to hold the toilet, and the other into a room that could have slept four but was filled entirely with women's clothes. There was a door at the far end that undoubtedly led back to the hallway. I went back into the bedroom. The other door, to the right of the wall, was a closet, obviously his unless she liked to wear men's suits to spice things up from time to time.

Content that I had the floor plan stored where I could find it if I needed it suddenly, I approached the painting. God, it was ugly. I checked behind it, found no evidence of an alarm or any cute little locking mechanisms that would prevent it being lifted from the wall. In fact, it seemed to be hanging on a regular old picture hanger like the ones you can buy in the supermarket, although a little heavier. I centered myself in front of the picture, grasped the frame by the sides, and lifted it. It came up easily, weighing only four or five pounds, and I pulled it away and lowered it to the floor. Without, as I said, looking at it. And there it was, that circle cut into the wall. Everything the Klee hadn't done for me, that circle did. My heart embarked on a little triple skip, my face was suddenly warmer, and I found I was breathing shallowly. The kind of reaction I would imagine a prospector might experience when he discovers that the rock he just tripped over is a five-pound gold nugget . . . but. But Janice hadn't mentioned the safe. Presumably, therefore, she didn't know about the safe, even though the information she'd handed me was detailed and accurate right down to the alarm code. So. What else hadn't Janice known about? And at that precise moment I felt the telltale prickling on the back of my neck. A little late, I covered the bottom half of my face with my forearm as though wiping sweat away and turned to survey the room, unfocused and trying to take it all in. There it was, at the edge of my vision, high up near the join of wall and ceiling: a little hole the size of a dime. Well, shit. Wiping my face with both hands, I walked briskly across the room, detouring around the bed and finding something on the carpet to look down at, and straight into the bathroom. In the medicine cabinet I found a travel-size can of shaving gel, popped the cap, and gave it a pointless shake. Then, edging along the wall, presumably out of sight of the little lens that was certain to be right behind that hole, I positioned myself until I was directly below it, flexed my knees, and jumped, my arm stretched above me. When the can's nozzle was even with the hole, I pushed it. One more jump, and I had a nice little billow of foam filling the hole. I tossed the can onto the bed and charged across the room to my bag. A second later I had a hammer and a chisel and I was dragging behind me a chair that had been sitting peacefully all by itself to the right of the paintings. I shoved it against the wall with the camera behind it and jumped up onto it. Time was not on my side. I'd been in the house almost too long already, but there was no choice. I had to do this, and it almost didn't matter how long it was going to take. But I was sweating for real now, my hands slippery inside the gloves. The question with surveillance cameras, if you're unlucky enough to be caught on one, is where the images are being stored. If they're on-site and you can find the storage device, you're good to go just take the whole thing with you. If the images are being stored off-site, then you're I hammered the chisel for the third time and levered it right, and a chunk of chalky-edged drywall broke off and fell to the floor and I realized I was screwed, because it was the worst possible scenario. The lines leading away from the camera jacks were telephone cable. So, either (1) the storage was off-site and I could give up looking for it or (2) the storage was off-site and I could give up looking for it, and the live feed was being watched by several not-easily-amused men who were at that very moment dispatching an armed response team. Well, the good news was that I didn't have to waste any time looking for the storage. The bad news was everything else. I checked the hole and found the foam starting to drip down the wall, so I just yanked the cable from the camera jacks. Then I jumped down from the chair and went back to the safe. Since I was already in the red zone for time, I gave myself an account of sixty to get the thing open. It took me all of nine seconds to get my bag unzipped and remove the five-inch suction cup, designed for glass but useful on smooth walls. I had to rummage to locate the second item, a Windex spray bottle filled with tap water. Two shots with the sprayer got the wall nice and wet and then I placed the cup evenly against the cut-out, centered it, and pushed it in to secure the seal. Took hold of the handle, and pulled. The cut-out popped free like a loose cork. It had been cut on a slight bias so it was larger on the outside than on the inside, making it a snap to remove and replace. I put the whole thing down next to the painting, closed my eyes for a second in vague, generalized supplication, and opened them to look at the safe. Fourteen seconds. I saw nothing to diminish my enthusiasm. Expensive, yes, shiny and solid-looking, designed to inspire confidence, but nothing that a relatively talented duffer couldn't pop, and I am not a duffer. Thirty-seven seconds of gentle persuasion later, it swung gently open. Something glittered at me. Fifty-one seconds. The glitter put an end to my internal argument, if I'd been having one. End of whatever wispy reluctance I might have felt about going another twenty or thirty seconds. Diamonds have a way of prevailing over logic. So I did it. I reached inside. And as my fingers closed over the cold fire and broke the beam of light that flowed from one side of the safe to the other, I heard three things. First, the squeal of something that needed oiling as it slid open downstairs. Second, a sudden increase in the volume of the dogs barking. Third, the sound of dogs toenails on marble. Inside the house. *Revue de presse Praise for Crashed* "If you're looking for a mystery with a fresh new hero then you'll want to run right out and get this book. It's just fabulous. If

you have a plane to take, then this is the book to grab."NPR's Morning Edition"Loved loved lovedCrashed, Tim Hallinan's first Junior Bender mystery. Great narrative voice, complex plot, 3-D characters. Hallinan's deft comic tone and colorful characters have earned him comparisons to Donald Westlake and Carl Hiaasen. Check it out now."Nancy Pearl"If Carl Hiaasen and Donald Westlake had a literary love child, he would be Timothy Hallinan. The Edgar nominee's laugh-out-loud new crime series featuring Hollywood burglar-turned-private eye Junior Bender has breakout written all over it... A must-read." Julia Spencer-Fleming, New York Times bestselling author of One Was a Soldier"Junior Bender is today's Los Angeles as Raymond Chandler might have written it. Tim [Hallinan] is a master at tossing out the kind of hard-boiled lines that I wish I thought of first."Bruce DeSilva, Macavity Edgar Award-winning author of Rogue Island"Timothy Hallinan's affable antihero, an accomplished thief but inept sleuth named Junior Bender, makes a terrific first impression in Crashed.... Benders quick wit and smart mouth make him a boon companion on this oddball adventure."New York Times"A fresh turn on Raymond Chandler... In Crashed, Hallinan's fabulously convoluted, wise-guy detective potboiler featuring Bender, the California author's voice intelligent, sarcastic, profane but never coarse, unfailingly honest is like a fast ride over a potholed road in a vintage Cadillac."San Antonio Express-News This is Hallinan at the top of his game. It's laugh-out-loud funny without ever losing any of its mystery. Its a whole new style and I love it. Junior Bender a crook with a heart of gold is one of Hallinan's most appealing heroes, rich with invention, and brimming with classic wit. I can't recommend it highly enough. Shadée Stevens, Late Late Show with Craig Ferguson"The story is well designed and well told, and the dialogue sparkles. In a genre perhaps slightly overstuffed with crook-heroes, the book is like a breath of fresh air."Booklist"This is one of those books you long for, wait for, and find once or twice a year"Beth Kanell, proprietor of Kingdom Books, Vermont"This fast-paced first in a series is great fun."Stop You're Killing Me (blog)Timothy Hallinan does everything a writer should do whose goal is to keep a reader entertained from the first sentence to the last.Tzer Island (blog)"Hallinan builds a believable plot, filled with both humor and pathos." ing the Evidence (blog)The writing is intelligent, relaxed, and fun to read. Crashed is a pleasurable outing, without the personal risk, to the criminal underbelly of Los Angeles, where moral ambiguity fills the air.Read Me Deadly (blog)"This detective potboiler with its oddball characters will keep you chuckling." The Martha's Vineyard TimesIf you're in the mood for a mystery that's just plain fun, this is the one for you... Timothy Hallinan knows how to write a smart aleck main character who has his own set of morals and a heart of gold. Kittling Books (blog)Praise for Junior Bender"Timothy Hallinan's The Fame Thief has everything I've come to expect in a Hallinan novel: indelible, complex characters, fantastic plot, and moments of hold-your-breath suspense."Charlaine Harris, author of the New York Times bestselling Sookie Stackhouse series"Could not stop laughing. Tim Hallinan is sharp as a blade, has a wicked eye for human nature and keeps the reader guessing and rooting for Junior Bender all the way."Helen Simonson, New York Times bestselling author of Major Pettigrew's Last Stand"Junior Bender is bound to be the topic of conversation amongst book lovers and crime fiction fans for a long, longtime." Robert Carraher,Seattle Post-Intelligencer"Hugely, splendidly entertaining... Full of delightful characters, and dialogue that provides at least one good laugh on every page, the book is so hard to put down you'll swear it's been glued to your hands."Booklist, STARRED (Little Elvies)