

**Media Kit**

**"An immensely readable thriller" – Kirkus Reviews**

**THE  
AGENT**



**MARSHA ROBERTS**

## Praise for “The Agent”

“Strong characters, humor, and twists contribute to an immensely readable thriller. This trio of charming cheaters will beguile readers.”

**Kirkus Reviews**

“*The Agent* is a page-turner; it is **impossible to put down** once started. There are many twists and turns within the captivating plot, engaging the reader from the first paragraph to the last. **A great summer read!**”

★★★★★ **Deborah Lloyd for Readers’ Favorite**

I would highly recommend *The Agent* as an intelligently crafted and entertaining read from start to finish, which is **sure to appeal to crime fiction fans everywhere.**

★★★★★ **K.C. Finn, Reader’s Favorite Reviews**

### About the Author



Marsha Roberts’ short stories and essays have been published in several ezines and anthologies. Her plays have been produced in various US and international venues.

Roberts was born in Washington D.C. and has a decades-long career as a U.S. and international H.R. executive and management consultant. She also heads up a non-profit that furnishes apartments of the formerly homeless.

The genesis of “The Agent” came from a couple of inspirations: to create an elegant, perfect scam led by a woman and to incorporate the strong influence of a high brow psychic.

Roberts lives in the San Francisco Bay Area with her husband and four-legged children. <http://www.marsha-roberts.com>

For Immediate Release  
June 15, 2020

**New crime thriller about an elegant scam in the multi-million dollar real estate world, led by a woman.**

***The Agent*** is a fast-paced debut thriller about a sophisticated con carried out by an engaging trio of high-class criminals. A smart, alluring female anti-hero is at the center of the story; you'll find yourself rooting for her, even though she's operating against the law.

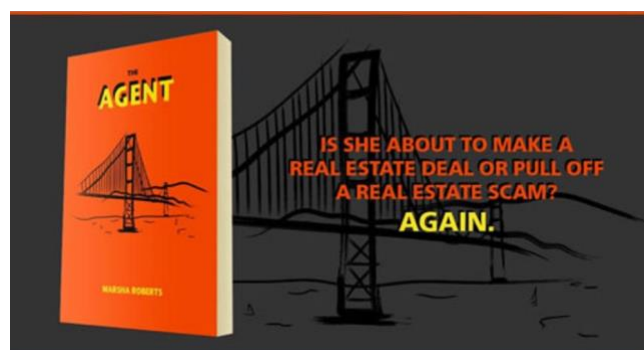
Victoria Clifford is the top real estate agent in affluent Marin County, California. She's also leading a few secret lives. The biggest one is the high stakes scheme she's about to pull off for the sixth time. It's the perfect crime, executed with the help of her charming brother and her aunt, a highbrow psychic to fortune 500 executives.

The newest victim is Maribeth Simmons, whose husband filed for divorce. When Victoria obtains the listing to sell their stately \$5.3 million home with a stunning view, the newest con begins. Tension escalates as major slip ups by the co-conspirators have them wondering if they'll be able to pull it off this time.

**It's been the perfect crime. So far.**

***The Agent*** is a page-turner, impossible to put down once started. Many twists and turns, plus a sprinkling of humor, make it a captivating read.

**“Strong characters, humor, and twists contribute to an immensely readable thriller. This trio of charming cheaters will beguile readers.” — Kirkus Reviews**



Marsha Roberts' short stories and essays have been published in several ezines and anthologies. Her plays have been produced in various US and international venues. <http://www.marsha-roberts.com>. The Agent is available on [Amazon](#), [Indiebound.org](#) and through local bookstores.

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## Excerpt from Chapter One of *The Agent*

The office was crazy busy, even for a Monday. This year would surely go down as one of the biggest boom years ever in San Francisco Bay Area real estate history. At eight in the morning the reception lounge already bulged with waiting clients. The main office area was like a trading floor ... phones ringing, staff rushing, voices loud over the din.

Josh jumped up to meet her. She couldn't help but smile; those boyish Italian types always got to her. "New client wants to talk with you about a listing on Sunset in Tiburon. Those go for around five or six mil, don't they? Here's the contact info." He spoke in a rapid clip and grinned as he handed her the paper.

She scanned the sheet, taking in the basic details about the property and its owners, then saw the small yellow Post-it at the bottom. *Can't wait to see you tomorrow nite*, it said.

She looked up to see him slide a wink at her.

"Got to go!" As he dashed past her, she caught a trace of his cologne and a warm wave shot through her. To think some women settled for just one man.

She turned back to the spec sheet. The owners were Charles and Maribeth Simmons. She called the number and made arrangements with Maribeth to see the house the next day. Then Victoria fell into the routine of returning calls and researching listings. A few hours later, she caught sight of her watch and was shocked to see that it was almost one. Her weekly appointment—the one she never missed—was in twenty minutes.

She grabbed her things and made for the door. "I'm off for a few hours," she told the receptionist. "Not sure if I'll be back today. I'll have my cell in case anyone needs to reach me."

It took only a few minutes to pick up lunch. She carried the low-fat, blueberry-yogurt smoothie outside, sipping in the thick sweetness slowly, rolling it over her tongue, savoring every drop. Next door was Phyllis' Burgers. The smell of grilling meat went straight to her salivary glands. Now that was what she really wanted ... a burger ... charred on the outside, a little oozy on the inside ... tart, melted cheddar topping it off. No lettuce, no tomatoes, no mustard, no ketchup, nothing to fetter the exquisite taste. Just a chunky, luscious burger, cheese spilling over the sides and a toasted bun—no, not a bun, a toasted sourdough baguette, yes, a sourdough baguette. Maybe just today to celebrate the deposit. After all, she deserved it. Over a million dollars, for God's sake. Come on— if not today, then when? The thought played in her head, messing with it.

No fucking way. Don't give in. Breathe in through your mouth—stop smelling it! One small slip and you'll be a size 16 again—your seams splitting with blubber and self-disgust. *Fatso, get your butt out here and help me with the lawn. It'll help work off some of that flab*, she heard her father say.

She speeded up and passed Phyllis'. No, the smoothie would do just fine, thank you. She caught a glimpse of her figure in a storefront window. It was worth it. No one would ever guess that she used to be a fat kid. She had to be careful, though—more than careful. Vigilant. Watch every morsel. Otherwise she'd be right back there—a blob. *You fat shit, there's no fucking way you're having that burger*.

She arrived at Tatiana's sipping the last of her smoothie.

"Hey, gorgeous, how are you doing?" Tim, the receptionist, kissed her on both cheeks. "You are looking fabulous. New boyfriend? Come on, you can tell me."

"No. Still single. Don't you have anyone for me, Timmy?"

"Honey, I hang out with the wrong crowd for that, but you don't need any help—you're not fooling me!" He led her into the private room reserved for facials. "Can I get you a glass of wine?"

"Some Sauvignon Blanc would be heavenly, thanks! Just half a glass, though. I'm gaining weight."

"What? You are not! I see those skinny little ribs sticking out!"

"No, really, Timmy. I'm up a half-pound since yesterday and I've hardly eaten anything!"

"Listen, the only part of you that's heavy is that plus-sized inner critic. Now you just get comfy. I'll be right back with the wine."

He closed the door and Victoria kicked off her shoes. Her aching toe, now raw with a blister, nestled into the lush carpet, savoring the sweet pleasure of release. She got undressed, wrapped the white terry towel around her chest and pulled her hair into a ponytail. She was just letting her muscles sink into the soft reclining chair when Tatiana bustled in.

"Victoria, darling, so good to see you. You look marvelous, as usual," Tatiana said in her thick, Ukrainian accent.

Tim brought in the glass of wine and set it down next to her. "See you later, hon." He closed the door gently behind him.

"Now you just relax and we make you even more beautiful." Tatiana reached for the first of the creams to be applied to her face.

Victoria took a long, smooth sip of wine and lay back in the chair. She let the piped-in harp music float into her mind, unwinding it—turning it off high alert—just for now. She let her nerves succumb to Tatiana's supple, sturdy hands as she smoothed and stroked her face and neck. She felt herself falling into a trance. Over a million deposited today and maybe the prospect of another million or two in three or four months. Her thoughts turned to the Simmons house. It sounded promising. There was something about it. It was too soon to tell, of course, but she just had a hunch. And her hunches were usually right.

She wasn't actually psychic, like her Aunt Vera, but every now and then she had a definite sense of what was to come. It wasn't really a feeling, but more like a sensation ... like she was perceiving the world in another frequency. It had happened when she saw Maribeth Simmons' name, as though she had known it all along. Like it was already part of her life, or her history. When she got these flashes, the future and present blended together into one unit of time, so that it was difficult to tell which events had already happened and which were yet to come.

If, indeed, Maribeth was to be next, Victoria couldn't wait to get started. It meant she would get to see Theo soon. Her heart gave a little skip. They would pull it off again, just as they had when they were kids. The stakes were much bigger now, and the risks way higher, and the thrill—the thrill was in a whole different sphere.

Unlike their scams as kids, though, this was not one they could do all on their own. At least so far, they hadn't figured out how. There was one part only their Aunt Vera could

play. The perfect crime. Five times now without a hitch. And entirely her own creation. A delicious smile formed under the moisturizing cream. She started to replay each of the cons in her head. Soon she was dozing, each breath a delicate sigh.

There was a gentle tapping on her shoulder. “Darling, it is finished,” Tatiana whispered.

Victoria forced herself out of her reverie. It took her a moment to collect the words to thank Tatiana. Fighting grogginess and a sense of stupor, she managed to get dressed and reapply her makeup, then made her way to the reception desk.

“Wow! Ravishing!” Tim gave her the once-over. “Honey, if I wasn’t such a queen, I’d pounce on you in a minute.” He grinned. “Need any products today?”

“Thanks! Yeah, actually, I do. A three-ounce jar of the rejuvenator.”

“Here it is. With the facial, that will be \$200,” he said.

She looked around quickly to make sure no one was close by, then handed him her credit card and three hundred-dollar bills. “Here you go.”

He pocketed the cash and processed the credit payment, keeping up the breezy banter without breaking stride. “Thanks, honey. Now you take care and have some fun. You work too hard!” He kissed her on both cheeks.

Back in her car, she reached into her purse for the cream. In the jar were two neatly folded bindles of cocaine. Good for a couple of weeks.

Yes, there was nothing like a few good secrets to keep life interesting, and the more the better. She thought about all the little secrets she had going, then turned her attention to the big one.

## Q&A with Marsha Roberts, author of *The Agent*

### 1. What is *The Agent* about?

**MR:** *The Agent* is about an elegant con game being run for the sixth time by a family trio of high-class criminals. It’s the brain-child of Victoria Clifford, the top real estate agent in affluent Marin County, California. She’s been pulling this caper off with the help of her charming but somewhat unstable brother and her aunt, who is a highbrow psychic to fortune 500 executives. It’s been the perfect crime all along, executed without a hitch. This time, though, her brother seductive powers seem to be waning and her aunt wants out of the scheme. Will they succeed in doing it for the sixth time or not?

### 2. What inspired you to write *The Agent*?

**MR:** Two things, really. The first was the movie “*Matchstick Men*,” (2003, directed by Ridley Scott, with Nicolas Cage and Sam Rockwell) about a very clever scam. I challenged myself to come up with a con that would be a “perfect crime.” Secondly, there was the experience of a colleague—a high-level executive, probably Mensa member—who went to a psychic and basically believed every word she said.

**3. Why did you choose a female anti-hero as the protagonist?**

**MR:** A few reasons ... First, I wanted to create a strong, smart female that runs a con, instead of the usual testosterone-fueled male with a woman as a side-kick. I also wanted her to be someone the reader would root for, even though she was committing a crime—and a crime against another woman, at that. Not easy. Hopefully, I achieved that.

**4. How did you go about making Victoria likable?**

**MR:** I don't think she's likeable, per se; but I do hope she's understandable. In reading the book you see that she had a difficult childhood. Throughout the book, her father's voice rings in her head, putting her down, calling her unflattering names. She exudes confidence on the outside while being very self-critical on the inside. Hopefully, readers can relate to that and give her a lot of credit for being able to achieve the outside part.

**5. What's with the relationship with her brother, Theo?**

**MR:** Theo had a nervous breakdown a few years ago; Victoria essentially saved him—brought him back to life. He is eternally grateful to her for this. They were very close as children and they still are. They rely totally on each other for emotional support.

**6. Why did you bring Vera, the psychic, in on the scam?**

**MR:** Again, a couple of reasons. A lot of people believe in psychics, including very smart people who would never admit it. As I mentioned above, I had a colleague who was a high-level executive. They were single and wanted very much to meet a life partner and they weren't having any luck in San Francisco. They went to a psychic who told them that they would meet their life partner in another state and even told them that person's first letter of their first name. My colleague moved to that state and within 18 months was married to someone who's name began with ... you get the picture. Also, I was intrigued by the notion of using psychic powers for business issues, not just personal challenges. Finally, I thought it would be fun for the psychic to be a very elegant "older" woman who has an MBA and is business savvy—not your grandmother's psychic.

**7. What was the hardest part of writing the book?**

**MR:** Orchestrating the timelines of the main plot and subplots so that events occurred in the proper order that would result in the desired endings of all the plots, including, of course, the main one. I actually planned out a day-by-day calendar, with each day divided into the main three or so plots so I could record what had to happen on specific dates for each plot/ subplot.

**8. You have an interesting business background. Did you draw on that at all in the book?**

**MR:** Of course! I was an H.R. executive in banking and biotech and now do quite a bit of consulting at the Board level. I've said jokingly many times that there's a



real market for reverse headhunting; i.e., a service that would help companies get rid of troublesome executives by getting someone to offer them great jobs elsewhere, or to get them to believe that a much better job lies right around the corner. One of the subplots is based on a similar theme. Also, my mergers and acquisitions background played into the unfolding of the Equate/ Bottom Line deal.

**9. What about real estate? Surely you must have a background in that?**

**MR:** I sure do, but not on the agent/ broker side. My husband and I have withstood a number of real estate transactions. I was always fascinated by the pas de deux performed by the realtor on each side. So, I wove that into the story. Fortunately, a couple of realtor friends advised me on the real estate aspects of the story to make sure I had it right, if not from an ethics standpoint at least from a transactional standpoint. Truth be told, I didn't follow all their advice.

**10. What do you want readers to take away from this book?**

**MR:** I want them to be able to escape all that troubles them for a few hours.

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