



Backhand

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BACKHAND has Anna Lee on the tennis courts, playing a challenge match with the woman who wants to hire her to find a friend's missing daughter. Lara Crowder, a shrewd American retailer of high fashion designs, explains that her friend, the designer, cannot work while worrying about her daughter, Cynthia. The seemingly straightforward missing-person investigation becomes increasingly complex, taking Anna from London to Sarasota, Florida, where she is drawn into a deceitful underworld of high finance, mob violence, and murder.

As the book opens, Anna, still employed by Brierly Security, is bored with her job, which at the moment makes her merely a sales representative for burglar alarms. She is also worried because her apartment building has been sold to developers, and David Quex, her love interest, wants her to move in with him and make their relationship a permanent one. Anna is given a welcome diversion when Lara Crowder asks her to find the missing Cynthia.

The case takes Anna on her Anna's first trip to the U.S., and she is awestruck by the vastness and beauty of the Florida Keys. She meets Rule Suarez, like Anna an ex-police officer turned investigator, who has also been hired by Lara Crowder, and they are soon confronted with mafia hitmen. It becomes apparent that Lara has not been honest about much of anything, except perhaps what she told Anna after their tennis match.

Lara said that for her the object of tennis is not tennis but gamesmanship, the mental game of power and control. When Anna finds that some "games" may include literally "beating" one's opponent, she rallies with the kind of mental toughness that is required not only to survive but to win, to expose the guilty. The plot relies rather heavily on cliché characters and unlikely plot twists, but Anna remains a likable wisecracking P.I., and she makes some important decisions about her life as well.

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