



## Laguna Heat

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After a traumatic killing in the line of duty, Tom Shephard leaves Los Angeles for Laguna Beach, hoping to rebuild his life shattered also by divorce. As the only homicide detective in the beach community's small police department, he is soon confronted with the badly burned corpse of a retired horseman. Tracing the killer leads him through a maze of small clues with no apparent pattern.

Another victim follows, and the only links are previous memberships in a tennis club called Surfside. Shephard's parents had been members thirty years before, and several deaths that occurred then, including his mother's, become factors in the case. A private detective with no limit to expenditures competes with Shephard in his attempt to locate the killer, while past members of the now extremely valuable Surfside Club continue to be implicated in murders present and past. Shephard's colorful friends, the huge enforcer Little Theodore and the bookie Odette, both aid him and add texture to the novel. A romantic interest is added to the mystery when the detective attempts to gain information from the daughter of the first victim.

The plotting is well thought-out and competent, though one of the major clues is a little too obvious. The characters are relatively standard types but well drawn and interesting, and there is no excessive use of coincidence or arbitrary devices to motivate the plot. The story is sufficiently compelling to keep the reader turning pages to discover how events will unfold; the only real flaw is a brief and unfortunate epilogue.

A good first novel, LAGUNA HEAT will please readers of detective and mystery fiction, and attract them to Parker's second novel, now in progress.

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