



Phillip Margolin

The Associate Unabridged
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Where Did the Idea for *The Associate* Come From?

One of the questions that I am most frequently asked on my book tours is, "Where did the idea for your book come from?" The idea for *The Associate* came from three unrelated events. In 1997, I was asked to be part of a month-long promotion of thrillers in The Netherlands. As part of this promotion, I was required to write a novella that would be published only in Holland. The story I wrote was based on the disappearance of a court reporter in Oregon in the late 1970s in a murder case that I was handling. I liked the novella and I toyed with the idea of expanding it into a full-length novel, but I was always side-tracked by the other books on which I was working.

Some time after I wrote the novella, my wife, Doreen, and I were in an art gallery in New York looking at a photo exhibition. Doreen got the idea for a story in which a person viewing a photo exhibition sees something in one of the photographs that is truly shocking. (I am being vague on purpose here because I don't want to spoil one of the surprises in *The Associate*).

I was a criminal defense lawyer for 25 years. One of the cases I argued in the Oregon Supreme Court challenged the use of hair identification evidence to connect a defendant to a crime scene. (This was before DNA tests.) When I undertook the appeal, I assumed that there must be a lot of scientific validity to conclusions you could draw from hair found at a murder scene because the FBI and other police agencies testified about their ability to connect hair to a specific individual.

After researching the topic, I got interested in the idea of "junk science"; that interest was heightened by a widely publicized product liability lawsuit in which claims were made that leaks from silicone breast implants were causing serious illnesses in women. When the manufacturers agreed to a billion dollar class action settlement I assumed that there must be validity to the plaintiffs' claims. Then I began reading about the results of scientific studies - which uniformly showed that there was no connection between the leakage from the breast implants and the specific types of injuries the women were claiming. I was shocked that a major corporation like Dow Corning would settle cases for huge sums of money when there was no factual basis for the claims.

This got me thinking about how science could be misused in a major product liability case. And at some point these three separate ideas came together to form one complete novel. It is not unusual for my mind to work this way. I will frequently get an idea for a book that I'm unable to develop into a complete novel - at least not right away. Later I'll get another idea for another book that I'm similarly unable to develop into a complete novel. At some point it will dawn on me that I might find a way to put the two ideas together to make a good book.

The Associate starts with an Arizona lawyer being shocked by something he sees in a photograph in a Soho art gallery. The bulk of the book centers on Daniel Ames, a young associate in a huge law firm who is part of a team defending a pharmaceutical company against charges that it is manufacturing a pregnancy drug that causes birth defects. Daniel uncovers information about the validity of the lawsuit that makes him the target of a killer. The back story that eventually leads to the discovery of the identity of the person behind this conspiracy is in large part the novella I wrote for my Dutch audience.

I hope you enjoy *The Associate*!

— Phillip Margolin