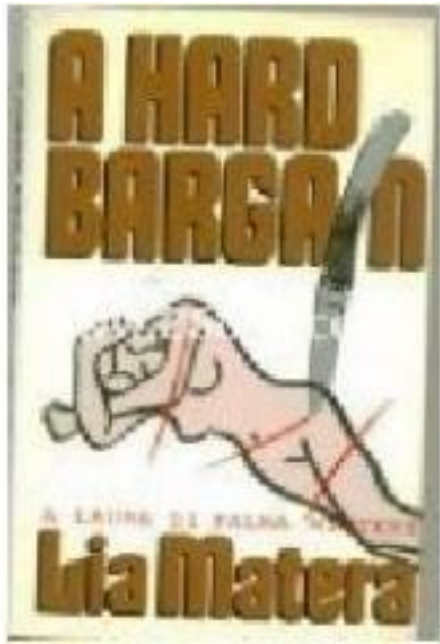


A Hard Bargain



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From Publishers Weekly Attorney Laura DiPalma, last seen in *The Good Fight*, has dropped out of the San Francisco law scene and, now unemployed, is living in her northern California hometown with her cousin and lover, Hal. Her former partner, Sandy Arkelett, arrives to ask the pair to help him find out whether Ted McGuin, a black paramedic who lives nearby, is responsible for his wife Karen's death, as her recorded final message implies. Karen, who was white, had a history of depression and self-mutilation and said in her message that Ted left her alone each day with a loaded gun. What, her family wonders, was his intention? Laura, intrigued and tiring of her staid life with dour Hal, accompanies Sandy as he visits Ted's parents, who say they loved Karen unconditionally. Karen's parents say the McGuins used their daughter-in-law to promote their crafts business. Ted's diving tank and boat are

sabotaged, spurring Laura and Sandy to search for the missing pieces in the puzzle of Karen's life. In this somber tale, Matera skillfully weaves Laura's dissatisfaction with her own circumstances into the investigation of Karen's death, taking a thought-provoking look at the dangers in relationships that grow too close. Reprint rights to Ballantine; Mystery Guild alternate; author tour. Copyright 1992 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Kirkus Reviews A grim third novel from the skillful Matera, who, here, examines noncommunication--with oneself and with everyone else--and its disastrous outcome. Bay Area lawyer Laura DiPalma, on an extended retreat with her cousin/lover Hal, is inveigled into working on a case with a former lover/partner, low-ideals man Sandy Arkelett. They're trying to find out what went wrong with the marriage of chronic depressive Karen Clausen McGuin, who left a tape for her husband, Ted, about committing suicide with the gun he purposefully handed her. Did he want to kill her? Or could she just not live any longer with the deformities caused from previously stabbing at her face and eye with an ice pick? Ted's in-laws hate him because he's black; Karen's despairing nephew hates him because he thinks he killed her; and Ted's eccentric family hates the Clausens for their long-time destruction of Karen and her nephew. Furthermore, Hal and Sandy loathe each other; Laura comes to truly dislike Sandy and to feel alienated from Hal; and the only one making any contact at all is the viper who poisoned Ted's scuba gear, blew up his boat, and torched his house. The resolution, when it comes, hardly frees anyone. From one of the more interesting new voices in detective fiction: a downbeat but welcome respite from the mystery-by-formula crowd. -- Copyright ©1992, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved. See all Editorial Reviews

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