

**The First Two Pages: “The Trouble With Saving The World”  
by Robert Lopresti**

From *Crimes Against Nature: New Stories of Environmental Villainy*,  
edited by Robert Lopresti (Down and Out Books)

An Essay by Robert Lopresti

For more than a decade I was the librarian who worked closely with the environmental college at a state university. I learned a lot about the ecological issues we face and the people who are gearing up to meet them.

It made me want to do something to help. But how? I am not the right person to climb mountains measuring ice cores, or study changes in bird migration, but I do know how to write crime stories. So I wrote *Greenfellas*, a comic caper in which the Mafia tries to save the environment.

But my true love is short stories, and I began to think about an anthology of crime stories on ecological themes. Lance Wright at Down and Out Books approved the idea, and I set to work gathering a fantastic collection of authors to write them. I decided the crowd, with plenty of Edgar, Shamus, and Anthony winners, was so impressive that no one would mind if I slipped one of my own stories in.

And I had an idea I thought worked perfectly: I wanted to write about recycling. This is a subject most of us are familiar with and may have strong opinions about. So, a good topic for fiction.

But I figured there was a problem. The subject was so obvious I thought several of my contributors would want to write about it. Reluctantly, I wrote a story in a different subject.

But, what do you know? It turned out my colleagues had other ideas. Literally. Some of them wrote about subjects that had never occurred to me—like overtourism, meth labs, and poison gardens—but none of them covered recycling.

So, lucky me, I was able to bring back my original story. It appears in the anthology *Crimes Against Nature*, which was published in October.

There were a few things I wanted to accomplish in my first two pages: 1) introduce the characters, especially the problematic woman being interrogated by the police; 2) set up the status quo before the event that led to the police involvement; and 3) leave the reader desperate to know exactly happened.

You can judge for yourself how well I succeeded.

### **The First Two Pages of “The Trouble With Saving The World”**

Blake was checking her notes when Juarez led the suspect into the interrogation room. He held her arm gently, as if she were an elderly crime victim instead of a perpetrator.

Margaret Chesborro wasn’t elderly. Probably late fifties, although she did look fragile for a woman of her age. She wore a green dress, suitable for office wear if you worked in a pretty conservative office. Short hair, sensible cut. Everything about her screamed *sensible*, or at least whispered it politely.

Except what she had done, of course.

Juarez got her settled and offered her a cup of tea or coffee, which Chesborro refused. He really was treating her like an elderly relative and Blake was trying to decide whether when the interview was over she would tease him for it or tear him a new one.

Blake pulled out the Miranda warning card and read it word for word. Last year a lawyer had gotten a case thrown out by claiming a cop recited the warning from memory, and how could the court be certain he hadn't missed some crucial adjective or preposition?

This conversation was being recorded but, hey, why take chances?

Ms. Chesborro assured them that she understood her rights. Was she willing to proceed without an attorney?

"Oh, yes." And then: "I didn't mean to do it. I swear I didn't."

Blake and Juarez exchanged looks. Well, that was an interesting beginning.

Best to take control of the interview. "We'll get to that. Please state your name for the record."

"Oh, certainly. My name is Margaret Guild Chesborro. That's one S and two Rs. I live in Cardiff Park, in apartment 317." She gave an embarrassed smile. "But you know that, don't you?"

"Yes, Ma'am."

"I've been in this complex for almost, let me think, six years. Time flies, doesn't it?"

"It does. What do you do for—"

"And in all that time there has never been a tragic event here like this one. I feel just terrible about it."

As if she had been an innocent bystander.

"Cardiff Park is a lovely complex in most ways, surrounded by woods. It's terrible the way the city lets developers tear down the trees around buildings these days, isn't it? There's one senior complex on the west side where all the streets are named for trees. Laurel Drive, Elm Court. A friend of mine lives on Maple Road. But, I swear there isn't anything bigger than a bush on the whole complex. They just flattened the place when they built it. What a shame."

"A shame," Juarez agreed.

Blake wondered whether he was just getting into the good cop role or was a secret tree-hugger.

"What do you do for a living?"

"Oh." Chesborro smiled again. "I'm the accountant at Nickell's Garden Supply over by the park. Do you know it?"

Juarez nodded. “My wife buys all her starter plants there every year. All those perennials and annuals. I can never remember which is which.”

Blake decided the horticultural discussion had to be nipped in the bud, pardon the pun.

“Does your job have any relevance to what happened this morning?”

She looked chastised. “No. Not really. But you did ask where I work.”

“Well, we’ve established that. Since it’s not connected—”

“But that’s really the point, isn’t it?” She looked at them bright-eyed, expecting agreement, or at least some sign of understanding.

“Everything is connected to everything else. I mean, that’s what the study of ecology is all about, isn’t it?”

“How do you figure?” said Juarez. “When I see people on the roadside with Department of Ecology jackets do you know what they’re doing?”

“No. What?”

“Picking up litter.”

She laughed. “Well, that’s part of it, isn’t it? Ecology is the study of how all the species affect each other. And heaven knows the garbage that humans produce affects everything that lives on the planet.”

“Is that it?” Blake said. She was trying to keep irritation out of her voice, but not succeeding. “You hate human beings?”

Chesborro looked shocked. “I don’t hate anyone, Detective.”

“Then how do you explain what you did?”

#

Robert Lopresti is a retired librarian who lives in the Pacific Northwest and the author of more than 100 short stories. He blogs at *SleuthSayers* and *Little Big Crimes*.