

JANE DOE

'THE HARDER THEY FALL'

SYNOPSIS

Aboard a fishing yacht on Saturday night, Melville Horning (David Groh), the nasty head of the Horning Cereal corporation, and his four vice presidents watch a documentary/expose about the company's unethical business practices. Horning is livid and demands that the person who provided damaging inside information come forward. No one admits to being the informant, so Horning fires the lot of them. Later, at about 4 a.m., still aboard the yacht, security man Jim Monroe (Dorian Harewood) awakens, feeling groggy and sick. He makes his way to the deck just in time to hear a splash in the water and to see Horning's floating body. He's too ill to jump in after Horning, but two of the VPs, now on deck, jump in to rescue the man. They accuse Jim of being drunk and admonish him as they carry Horning's limp body to his quarters. Jim thinks he's dead, but evidently his senses weren't to be trusted. The next morning, the yacht's captain visits Jim, tells him that Horning is okay but furious about his security man being drunk. Jim is fired.

On Sunday, housewife/government agent Cathy Davis (Lea Thompson) and her family enjoy their day while, on TV, Horning appears in a live interview, disputing charges made in the documentary. Elsewhere, Jim Monroe is protesting his innocence during an argument with his wife; he was not drunk, he maintains; and that man was dead! On Monday night, Horning's dead body turns up in the ocean off Newport Sands. And Cathy once again is called out of retirement by Agent Frank Darnell (Joe Penny) to investigate the case. It's personal this time, he explains, as Jim Monroe is a former colleague of theirs.

Cathy and Frank immediately entertain the idea that, as Jim maintained, Horning was dead for several days. But he was on live TV on Sunday and the coroner's preliminary report indicates he died at about midnight on Monday. But Cathy and Frank are suspicious, so they decide to investigate a little more. At the funeral, Cathy encounters potential suspects, the four vice presidents who happened to sell their shares of the company on Monday, before news of Horning's death caused a collapse in its stock-market value. The VPs are Tom Shaunessy (Stewart Finlay-McLennan), Daniel Vasquez (Randy Vasquez), Frances Nakamura (Jo Champa) and, the youngest, Doug Maynard (Christopher Gartin). Cathy also meets Horning Cereal CFO Stella Andre (Helen Slater), who wasn't aboard the yacht and who is in position to take over. Before the funeral ceremony is over, there are ugly verbal exchanges between these execs. It's clear that at least one of these people is hiding something.

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Posing as a Wall Street Journal reporter, Cathy visits the set of the "Money Talks" TV show on which Horning was interviewed on Sunday. While pumping a production assistant for info, Cathy notices that the chairs on the set are nailed down -- and not the same style chairs that were in the Sunday interview show. Once she finds out that Horning Cereal owns the TV network, she begins to put two and two together: that the interview wasn't live and that the questions were tailored to fit archival interview answers, all to make it appear Horning was still alive until the VPs could sell their stock in the company on Monday. But was Horning killed or was his death accidental? And why does the coroner's report indicate he drowned on Monday?

Cathy and Frank delve deeper into the lives of their suspects. Cathy also discovers that, although a large catch cooler was unloaded from the yacht on Sunday morning, a container large enough to hold 200 pounds of fish, there were no fish to be found at Horning's home. She reasons that Horning's body, not fish, was kept on ice for a couple of days, delaying rigor mortis and decomposition, thereby fooling the coroner. Frank, meanwhile, interviews the documentary filmmaker, trying to learn who was behind the company information leak; the filmmaker says he never met his informant, that he got his facts via e-mail, an account that Frank traces to an Internet café. Meanwhile, a more thorough probe by the coroner indicates that the victim was hit over the head with a blunt object. Cathy now believes that Jim Monroe was drugged and that Horning's death was premeditated murder. But which of the execs aboard the yacht that night is responsible?

But Cathy then figures it all out: the "architect" of the murder plot wasn't even on the yacht at the time of the murder. The person responsible is Stella, the CFO. By leaking info to the documentary filmmaker (Frank, incidentally, has finally traced those e-mails to her), she manipulated the boss into firing his vice presidents. She also drugged Jim Monroe, the security man, by putting a doped gift basket of food in his quarters. And she manipulated Maynard, the youngest of the VPs, into performing the actual murder by informing him of a closely guarded secret: that Horning was his biological father. It's all part of her plan to grab power.

Cathy confronts Stella at Horning Plaza, who confesses but also draws a gun on Cathy, not content to give up meekly. But Frank and Jim arrive just in time. Jim shields Cathy from Stella's gunshot and Darnell takes Stella out with one shot. They'll arrest Maynard for his part in the evil doings, even though he was actually just Stella's dupe. Case closed. Jim Monroe's reputation is restored. And Cathy can return once again to her life of domesticity.