

StoneDust

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CRIME

By MARILYN STASIO

You couldn't ask for a more picturesque demise -- on a quaint covered bridge in "the prettiest town in New England" -- than the one arranged for Reg Hopkins in Justin Scott's *STONEDUST* (Viking, \$19.95). Not that Reg was in any shape to appreciate his artistic death scene: according to a state trooper in Newbury, Conn., the upstanding young businessman died from a heroin "hotload."

The ambitious executives and grasping entrepreneurs in Reg's smart set would like to hush up the nasty business and just get on with their P.T.A. meetings and Jacuzzi orgies. Only Benjamin Abbott 3d, a descendant of the Yankee ministers and horse traders who originally settled Newbury, tries to clear the reputation of his childhood friend.

Speaking in wry, dry accents as the witty narrator of these suburban scandals, Ben is not a sweet talker or a fast talker, but a genuine smoothie. A former Wall Streeter who did time in Leavenworth for insider trading, this offbeat freelance sleuth is currently eking out a cleaner, duller living as a realtor. Ben lays some lovely traps for the social parvenus whose moral values are no less dubious than their business ethics. But it's his sardonic views on his self-important neighbors that give this sophisticated series its unexpected and wholly delicious tartness.