

# KARY 101: murder beckons

by Mark Okrant

Prequel to the Kary Turnell Mystery series

**\*\*A sampler of 4 Kary Turnell books follows\*\***

So you're a reporter for the *Globe*. I'm flattered that one of the country's leading newspapers wants to do this article. The way you're looking at me, I sense you're surprised by my appearance. A number of people say I look like the actor in that new movie everyone's talking about . . . whatever his name is.

Unless we've met at the university or at a golf course in the area, I don't go out in public very much. When I'm not teaching classes or trying to revive my golf game, I covet my privacy. Most of the time, I'm sitting at home tearing my hair out. As you already know, I wrote a best seller several years ago, but haven't been able to duplicate my success. I presume that's why you're here. What you probably don't know is that I have a driving ambition to spend my time solving what the police term "unlawful premeditated killings of human beings," or what your readers would call *murders*.

I have to be one of the last guys you'd expect to have an interest in this. As you can see, I'm not a terribly imposing physical specimen. My eyeglasses are as thick as Coke bottles. I've never been in the military, and I absolutely hate guns. Furthermore, my experience at mixing with a tough crowd is limited to announcing a midterm examination to a classroom full of undergraduate students. I don't mean to undersell myself, but self-deprecation has become a forte of mine in recent years. Don't be fooled . . . I have a great deal of faith in my proficiencies. If you're wondering how I might possibly contribute to

a murder investigation, I advise you to heed my late mother's advice: don't judge a book by its cover.

I presume you haven't driven all the way up here to listen to me daydream. You're more interested in how a one time *New York Times* bestselling author fell from grace, and what the future holds. This subject is painful to me. I've carefully avoided the public for a long time, but it's time to let the world know what's been going on with my life. Hopefully, doing this interview will prove therapeutic for me.

Before we discuss the present, you'll need a little history lesson. I was born and brought up in Philadelphia, the youngest of five children to two terrific parents, Henry and Lois Turnell. My father was a beat cop who rose quickly through the ranks and became a detective within five years. My mother was a housewife, which was the norm in those days. My two sisters, Mary and Pam, were the first in our family to attend college, and both are finishing long careers as elementary school teachers. My brothers, Hal and Steve, opened a hardware store in south Philly after graduating from high school. It was my father's dream that all three of his sons would become police officers. Since neither of my older brothers chose to join his profession, it placed a good amount of pressure on me, as I'm sure you can imagine.

I loved and respected my father. He was kind and supportive. Dad was a great role model: proud, courageous, not to mention rather intense. It wasn't easy to let him down; however, I did come closer to making him happy than Hal and Steve. After spending two years at Princeton, I ended up getting my bachelor's degree in Sociology from Temple. Before you ask why anyone would give up an Ivy education, I left

Princeton to avoid building up loans I knew would be impossible to pay in fewer than two decades.

While I was at Temple, I developed an interest in crime solving, in part from my father's work. Most of the rest came from my love of reading murder mysteries. The truth is I became hooked on crime solving during the summer before my senior year at Temple. My father had a connection with Lucas Benhoff, the general manager at the Rittenhouse Hotel, which Dad used to get me a summer job. I take it you have heard of the Rittenhouse. It's a four star, five diamond establishment. Guests from all over the world stay there—politicos, celebrities, and sports stars included. During that summer, I worked directly with Mr. Benhoff, and he became a sort of honorary uncle to me.

That summer, there was a death at the hotel. A local celebrity with connections to the Philly mob was found dead in his bathtub. There were no signs of a struggle and it appeared that he had slipped and hit his head on the rim of the tub. The deceased had never been very popular with the cops, so they were just as happy to write it off as an accident. Of course, Mr. Benhoff wasn't very pleased about this, as it meant his insurance rates, not to mention the Rittenhouse's reputation for guest safety, would be affected.

I had a great deal of admiration for Mr. Benhoff and wanted to help him somehow. Of course, since I was just a twenty year-old college kid with no credentials of any kind, neither he nor my father was about to allow me to become involved. After giving things a few days of thought, I decided to conduct my own investigation. In my mind, I'd learned enough from my father as well as Sam Spade and Philip Marlowe to do an effective job. It still makes me smile to think how naïve I was. With a cheap spiral

notebook and a mechanical pencil in hand, I wrote down five statements. Would you believe I've held onto this notebook all of these years?

- 1) be discreet, be very discreet
- 2) no person is too influential or insignificant to interview
- 3) deduction is at the root of crime solving
- 4) wear the fedora
- 5) I love historic resort hotels!

I felt it was important that I figure out how to interview people about the incident without letting anyone know what I was doing. That's what I mean by discretion. If I failed in this, the person would certainly clam up and might even report me to Mr. Benhoff or my father. To my surprise, I was a natural at wheedling information out of people . . . the housekeepers, the food service staff, the doorman . . . even the wealthy couple staying in the room next door. I was able to get information from all of them, even when the police detectives couldn't. What can I say . . . people trust me . . . that is, everyone except my own family. I find that rather ironic.

Using the new information I'd obtained, I was able to deduce that the deceased had a visitor that night, a well-dressed man in a top hat who left in a hurry right about the time of the "accident." When I shared this information with my father, he was at first non-plussed. Someone in his position could have been forgiven if he ignored or strongly reprimanded me. But my father was not built that way. He was equally proud of my initiative and unhappy with the detective who should have been investigating the incident. Of course, this episode served to heighten Dad's resolve to recruit me for the police force.

Armed with this new information, my father was able to move the investigation in the right direction and arrests were made. Upon hearing about this, I made the decision to

adopt a Spade and Marlowe persona, and have been wearing a fedora since then. If there was one other thing that resulted from my time at the Rittenhouse, it was my obsession with historic resort properties.

You're probably wondering if my father finally was able to recruit me to be a cop. One of my numerous regrets is I didn't join the force the way he wanted. Of course, Dad must have been disappointed, but he never showed it in my presence. Instead of wearing a badge, I applied those natural investigative skills, plus a recommendation from Mr. Benhoff, to get my first job . . . as a crime reporter for the Philly *Inquirer*. I honestly feel that joining the police force wouldn't have succeeded for long anyway. In fact, I am certain that's the case.

I'm sitting here and looking at you, my young reporter friend. I'd surmise your age to be 30 to 32 years, and I'm usually pretty accurate about such things. Here's my point in asking. This means you're too young to remember the days before DNA became the end-all in major criminal cases. Our friends in Great Britain were the first to do this, and that was in 1986, not long after you were born. During my father's day, crime solving was mostly about finding the suspect's fingerprints on a murder weapon and gathering eyewitness testimony. A good detective depended much more on deductive reasoning—à la Sherlock Holmes—than young counterparts do today. Sometimes I think deduction is a dying art.

To get back to my story, two things happened within a year of my graduation from Temple. Both of these were life-changing experiences. The first proved to be as wonderful as the second was disillusioning.

Like any nerdy-looking guy, I experienced a form of separation anxiety following my graduation from college. It's true that I was enjoying my job, but evenings meant spending a lot of time alone in my apartment, reading and watching television. One night, a former roommate called and asked if I would double date with him and his fiancé. Of course I said no thanks. He practically begged me to reconsider. He'd probably called everyone else he knew. It sounded like I was his last hope. For some reason, I accepted, albeit reluctantly. That change of heart proved to be the best move I ever made. My date, Nya, was an amazing woman . . . incredibly intelligent, funny, and with the face and figure of a goddess. Amazingly, she actually seemed to like my company. To make a long story short, she married me a year later.

I might still be a crime reporter today if it weren't for the birth of our first daughter, Sara, and the second event I alluded to just a minute ago. Not long after Nya and I were married, there was a killing in south Philly that had the entire metro area on edge. The young wife and mother-in-law of an eastern European immigrant disappeared from their apartment. Neighbors had heard shouting, then screaming. When the police arrived they found pools of blood everywhere, but the husband was nowhere to be found. Several weeks passed before my father and his partner, using an anonymous tip, learned that the husband was hiding in a vacant boathouse along the Schuylkill River. They caught the guy sitting in a parked car nearby, and arrested him after a brief struggle. Unfortunately, in the heat of the moment, my father made a rookie mistake. Dad neglected to read the man his rights before he opened the trunk of the car, where the *perp* foolishly had hidden the bloody murder weapon. It was a *zirh*, a Turkish kitchen knife. Within twenty-four hours after making the arrest, the two partners were being hailed as

heroes. Unfortunately, fame was to be short-lived. It's a fact of life that cases like this attract the attention of headline-seeking defense attorneys. And the perp in this instance was represented by one of the best. It didn't take the lawyer long to learn about my father's error at the crime scene. Within days, the barrister was working the press . . . successfully. In the end, the judge was given little choice but to side with the defense attorney's arguments about abusing the Miranda Act. Of course, the case was dismissed. As a result, my father and his partner were suspended for three weeks without pay. I was devastated and refused to cover the story for the *Inquirer*. A few days later, I was accused by a crime reporter from a rival paper of being gutless and incompetent, "just like yer old man." It was rather stupid for a journalist to get into the face of a cop's kid. My father had sent all three of his sons to Kid Kallan's Gym back in the fifties. It gave me great pleasure to cold-cock that prick.

I wish that were the end of the story. Unfortunately, a year later to the day, the same guy who was set free murdered his second wife in cold blood. My father resigned in disgrace and, a short time later, collapsed and died while reading an account of the story in the *Inquirer*.

Naturally, I knew my days as a crime reporter were numbered. With Nya's encouragement, I gave the *Inquirer* my notice. Given my background and education, researching the impact of crime on society was in my blood. Besides, it was a way to honor my father's memory. So, I returned to school and, shortly after the birth of my younger daughter, Amanda, earned my doctorate in Sociology with a specialization in Criminology. After a couple of years teaching at Dakota State, I was offered and accepted the position I now hold here in New Hampshire.

One would think that my life at that moment was a bowl of cherries. Unfortunately, I couldn't shake the way that murder case killed my father. A recurring dream—where the murderer walks by my father and me in the courtroom, with a vicious smile on his face—awakened me in a cold sweat for years.

Then Nya came up with a brilliant idea. She told me I had to find a way to let the past go, to “cleanse my system,” she said. I reminded her that neither counseling nor good booze had helped thus far. So she recommended that I write a book about the entire incident. When I protested about a lack of time to do proper research, my brilliant wife looked at me and said three magic words, “Write a novel.” As I frequently do, I took my beloved wife's advice and wrote a murder mystery, *A Hot Night in South Philly*.

Amazingly enough, Random House published it. *Hot Night* was hailed for its realism. I was being mentioned in the same breath as John MacDonald. That thought still makes me laugh. For more than six months, I was on every major television and radio talk show. I actually needed to take a leave of absence from teaching to satisfy all of the requests for personal appearances and book signings. Random House even signed me to develop a series based upon the lead character in my book. Everything was going great. I had supplemented our income handsomely and, more importantly, rid myself of the nightmares. If only the cure had been permanent.

It's hard to describe just how great that experience felt, and painful to explain how circumstances changed so quickly. I went from riches to rags in the twinkling of an eye. I found myself in the midst of a prolonged, incurable case of writer's cramp, missing deadline after deadline. Then the *New York Times Review of Books* labeled me a one-book wonder. It was humiliating. It's funny, though; while I had lost the ability to write

fiction, I was knocking out publishable articles in my field. The latter just didn't prove satisfying, and I became obsessed with writing another bestseller. What a fool I was. I lost sight of what was really most important: my marriage to Nya and my role as a parent to two beautiful, terrific daughters.

Nya's place in my life took on the character of occasional-friend and fulltime therapist. On those rare occasions when I wasn't consuming a lot of alcohol, we had meaningful conversations about Sara and Amanda, Nya's own very successful career, candidates for public office, even the state's decision to make tourism businesses pay to put their names on signs at the interstate's exits. The one topic that we didn't discuss was my writer's block because those discussions led me to sulk and drink more alcohol. Things gradually became worse and, before long, I would stomp out of the room like a five year old. Then my mental state became really bad. I was drinking even more heavily. It didn't matter whether there was whiskey, wine, or whatever in the house. Every wastepaper basket became littered with my empties. Nya asked me to go to counseling. After therapy failed, Nya knew instinctively I'd need to find solutions of my own; but I was in no hurry. Hell, at least when I was drunk, I wasn't feeling sorry for myself. Poor Nya; she wanted to live her life to the fullest, while I basically had ceased living mine.

What I'm going to say next must be kept in strictest confidence. If you won't agree, this interview is over. I'm telling you this so you can get a full sense of how my life devolved. Starting sometime in the mid-nineties, boozing began to undermine my roles as a husband and father. Fortunately for my daughter Sara, she was away from home by this time—first at college, then as a member of the workforce and as a wife. Poor Amanda bore the brunt of it. She was around sixteen when I started drinking. Let's

just say that, for all intents and purposes, Amanda was raised by a single parent. It would have been easier for her if I weren't around at all.

There's no doubt that my relationship with Nya's twin sister, Maya, is even worse. Nya and Maya probably wondered whether I was having an affair. While I can assure you that never, ever was the case, Maya still doesn't trust me at all. I think the US and Cuba will resume normal diplomatic relations long before Maya and I do. Damn, it kills me that I've done this to my family!

There is some good news to report. I've been working with a member of the counseling staff at my university for about a year. She helped me understand why I turned to the bottle in the first place. I finally realize that my drinking was a means to cover up terrible feelings of guilt—primarily about using my father's misfortune as the subject of my best seller . . . if only the damned book didn't take off the way it did. The counselor tells me that I developed a deep-seated need to punish myself. Meanwhile, instead of enjoying appearances on Leno and Letterman, I was scared shitless. I felt like a fraud, convinced that I'd never write another piece of popular fiction. That fear was palatable. Since I felt undeserving of past successes, booze became my way of cushioning the truth. This is extremely difficult for me to talk about, and it makes me physically ill to think about the hurt I've caused my family.

I'll tell you this, young man, I'm determined to overcome my demons. Thanks to frequent counseling, I'm making slow but steady progress. And, Nya, bless her heart, told me she's noticed a change for the better in me. This morning, she said there may be some hope for us. When Nya told me that, I could have cried. She's not making any promises, mind you, and I certainly don't deserve any. My daughter Sara has been remarkably

understanding, thank goodness, but I can't see that happening anytime soon with either Amanda or Maya.

No, I haven't written a cogent paragraph of fiction since *Hot Night* was released. There just has to be something that will stimulate those old juices.

Nya told me this morning that she's committing to one last chance. She's booked a vacation for the two of us at one of the wonderful historic hotels in northern New Hampshire—The Balsams. The place is even older than the Rittenhouse. I guess she's hoping that somehow the charm and tradition will restore me to the man she married. We're headed up there in a little over a week. No doubt you've heard that timeworn tautology, 'new beginnings'. I'm determined that this will be ours.

*The End*

*Enjoyed the Prequel? Don't stop here.*

*If you have enjoyed reading “In the Beginning There Was Kary Turnell,” and want to follow all of his investigations to date, here is how to continue this compelling series:*

**Kary Turnell Mysteries**

*A Last Resort* (Kindle and paperback)

*I Knew You When* (Kindle)

*An Icy Reception* (Kindle and paperback)

*Murder With a View* (Kindle, a short story)

*Murder at the Grands* (paperback) . . . contains both *I Knew You When*  
and *Murder With a View*

*Whacked* (paperback)

**How to find Kary Turnell Mysteries**

*[nhbooksellers.com](http://nhbooksellers.com)*

*[beechriverbooks.com](http://beechriverbooks.com)*

*[amazon.com](http://amazon.com)*

*or an independent book dealer near you*

*Read on . . . . .*

*Presentations from the Kary Turnell Mysteries*

*A Last Resort*

Dixville Notch, Friday, July 14. It was a great day for some and a good day for others, but, by all appearances, a terrible day for a certain guest at The Balsams Grand Resort Hotel. Before we go too far, allow me to introduce myself. My friends, few though they may be, call me Kary. My students at the state U call me Professor Turnell. Twenty years ago, I was a crime writer for a major Philadelphia newspaper. I left the paper under, shall we say, less than favorable circumstances. So I went back to grad school and earned my doctorate in sociology from Minnesota State. For the last fifteen years, I have been teaching sociology and criminology at the brick and mortar campus in Plymouth, a beautiful place just south of the White Mountains in New Hampshire. While I love teaching, the fact of the matter is I'd rather be writing novels, award winning novels, for a living. This leads me to the story I want to share with you.

Ten years ago, I wrote a novel; I dare say, a really good murder mystery. It was so good that it stayed near the top of the New York Times Best Seller List for six months. It was so popular that it paid for a house Nya and I had coveted for years. The royalties also made it possible to send our beautiful daughters to the private, overpriced colleges of their choice. More to the point of this story, it was so good that my picture adorned The Balsams' Wall of Fame, the corridor where the resort's management has placed the signed photographs of their famous past guests. Very few things—the first time I made love with a woman, any time I spend with my daughters, eating a cheese pizza with red bell peppers at Sally's on Wooster Square in the Elm City, the perfect Fireball—have given me greater pleasure than walking along the corridor that connects the Dixville House and Hampshire House, and seeing my smiling face hanging near pictures of Babe Ruth, John Philip Souza, Art Linkletter, Ken Burns and a host of other notables. Too

much time had passed since I last made that walk. *Why*, you ask? As humbling is to admit, I'd been too caught up in trying to write the sequel to my prize winner.

In fact, there has been a prevalence of guilt associated with this valued honor. You see, way deep down, I've always known that it wasn't the success of a single novel that earned me my exalted spot in the Wall of Fame. My twenty-something year friendship with the resort's general manager, Warn Barson, had much more to do with it. Warner S. Barson, Warn to his friends, and I met in the early eighties at some now obscure meeting. We had hit it off instantly. I appreciated his wit, intelligence, and integrity immediately. He liked my "pluck," as he called it. But more about Warn later. While he had not instigated the decision to visit The Balsams on that fateful July day, Warn certainly had a hand in the outcome of my visit.

Actually it was my wife, Nya, who, out of the clear blue, suggested that we head north to Dixville Notch. Nya was born and raised in Venezuela, the daughter of an American diplomat. She attended an ivy-covered campus in Boston, and with hard work, has become a successful publicist. We chose to live in New Hampshire because we, or rather I, love the lifestyle here. You're probably wondering why we don't live in western Connecticut or on Long Island, closer to where the action is in Nya's world. To be honest, it's because of me; I couldn't stand living in the Big Apple where too many people would recognize me everywhere I went. They would ask constantly, "When's your new book coming out, Kary;" or worse, my closer acquaintances would make comments like, "Don't worry Kary, at least Nya's earning a buck." People in the Big Apple can be so damned obnoxious . . . not to mention honest. So that's why we live in

New Hampshire. Throughout our marriage, if something made *me* feel comfortable, Nya was all for it.

For ten years, Nya had endured my writer's cramp and everything that went with it. You see, I hadn't been able to write a solid paragraph since that single successful effort during the early nineties. Yeah, that's the nineties...nine-zero. You don't need to say it; I fully realize that that was a decade ago. Hell, my only whiff of success was during the last damned century! But, you know what the amazing thing was? Throughout this prolonged period of my personal agony, Nya had been an angel. Her career had taken off like an Apollo rocket. At the same time, put up with my late night hours, the reams of wasted paper, the boozing and the swearing. And all of this had been going on far longer than it should take to complete *two* Bush presidencies. But, what had been the worst for her was my total apathy in the bedroom. Yeah, you *do* understand correctly. Kary Turnell, former big shot with the sorority sisters, had lost interest. Lost interest in what? Jeez, do I have to draw you a damned picture? Whether it had been because of her success, my lack of it, or a combination of the two, I had taken leave from my wife's bed—figuratively speaking, that is. And, while she seldom confronted me about it, Nya had become increasingly anxious and, in all likelihood, frustrated by my functional disappearance from the bedroom.

Finally, one day last June, realizing that one or both of us was about to explode, Nya had recommended a change in scenery. So my beautiful, love-starved spouse secretly made arrangements for the two of us to spend a month at the one place on this planet that gives us peace—The Balsams. One day, she informed me that I was to plan absolutely nothing between the fourteenth of July and the ides of August. We were going

on what she termed “a retreat”. She insisted that I bring nothing remotely related to my professorial duties or, more to the point, any aspirations to recapture my success as a published author. She agreed to leave the trappings of her successful business behind as well. Then, when the time to pack for our retreat had arrived, I reluctantly left my notebook computer on the table in my daughter’s old bedroom, which now doubles for my home office. But, Nya proved to be more honorable than her husband. While she packed only clothing, cosmetics, and athletic equipment, I tucked a Mont Blanc Meisterstruck into my dopp kit and secreted a yellow-lined pad into the folds of my favorite dress shirt. Of course, Nya was on to me before I could close the zipper on my large green duffle. Within seconds, she had found both pen and pad. With a stern but loving look on her beautiful face, Nya ignored my whimpering while she wordlessly, but very effectively, filched me. There was to be no work-related frustration allowed during our getaway. Our trip to The Balsams was strictly about R&R. No work . . . particularly on novels . . . was going to be permitted. And, here’s the best part; I had been successful at convincing both Nya and myself that there would be no booze. I promised both of us that any drowning of angst would be limited to one, or more, of Chef L’s award-winning desserts.

Little did I realize that, instead of a quiet little getaway with a lot of rest and relaxation, we were about to have one of those “life changing” experiences you often hear about on TV talk shows.

\*

\*

\*

*I Knew You When*

As they tooled north along Interstate 93, Dana Cerone was in a terrific frame of mind. “Can you believe Charles actually gave us permission to do this?”

“I was shocked,” replied her colleague and best friend, Maya Lassiter. “Funds are usually so tight at CNHS, just like every other public high school. For Charles to find money for *both* of us to be there, cover our registration fees, plus spring for two nights at a resort—I can’t believe it.”

“And don’t forget the subs; they must be costing a hundred and twenty apiece.”

The two women had taught together at Crawford Notch High School since the mid-eighties. Maya, an Italian teacher, and Dana, who taught the Natural Sciences, had been instructing their respective Advanced Placement courses for several years. Despite being regarded as two of the best teachers at CNHS, they were well aware of economic realities. So it was little wonder they could barely contain their excitement when Principal Charles Barker approved both requests to spend three days and two nights conferring with other AP teachers at the elegant Mount Washington Resort in New Hampshire’s White Mountains.

“Three days of pampering myself!” Dana nearly howled.

“You’re forgetting something *cara mia*,” Maya reminded her friend, “We’re here to attend a conference, which means detailed reports to Charles, not to mention revised lesson plans. Besides, I’m vice president of NHTAP, so I’ll be stuck in board meetings half the time.”

“But I won’t!” Dana laughed as she smacked her friend on the arm.

“Ouch, Dana, that hurts! Are you trying to make me wreck this car? You know I wouldn’t even be driving this stick shift if you weren’t here to help me.” The two women

had rented a red, five-speed, Ford Mustang convertible to celebrate the occasion or, if truth be told, because Maya's SUV was spending more time in the Draper Garage than in her own driveway lately. Because the two women had rejected the Enterprise agent's recommendation to get temporary auto insurance, the last thing they needed was a car wreck, especially on teachers' salaries. Maya was extremely uncomfortable driving the fast, standard shift car but, when they were only five miles from the resort, finally had acquiesced to Dana's insistence that she get behind the wheel.

“Sometimes you're too damned aggressive for your own good, Dana,” Maya said.

As the two women entered the long spiraling driveway leading toward the grand resort, they had no way of knowing how prophetic Maya's words would prove to be.

## *An Icy Reception*

*0730 hours, Friday, September 7<sup>th</sup>, 2007, on the bridge of the MS Explorer.*

Captain Jesper Sverge stood facing the bow of the small, red-hulled cruise ship that sat at anchor in Iqaluit harbor. For the past ninety minutes, he and the other ship's officers had met with the earnest young woman who accompanied them. Dahlia Tweed, a diminutive, fit woman in her mid-twenties, represented Adventure Canada, a tour company that led an annual series of expeditions, or eco-trips, into the Canadian Arctic. Adventure Canada had just concluded the second of four legs in that season's journeys, a circumnavigation of Baffin Island. At the start of each new leg, it was Dahlia's responsibility to review upcoming itineraries with the ship's captain and officers. Captain Sverge, a big Swede with many years experience at the helm, was like a second father to her. The other officers admired Dahlia and, given the fact she was a very attractive young woman, had dubbed her "see-worthy." Normally, Dahlia looked forward to these preliminary sessions, as she loved the give-and-take with the captain and his young officers. This time was different. Dahlia was eager to conclude the session quickly, for Clark, the young musician she had been seeing for several months, was waiting in her cabin. Dahlia wasn't sure where things were going with the ever-brooding Clark, but was anxious to be close to him before the passengers came aboard. As she started for the doorway leading from the bridge to the lower decks of the ship, Dahlia suddenly thought of something and stopped in her tracks.

"About Manuel Lopez . . . ," she said, while fixing her pretty azure eyes on the captain's own dark ones.

"Oh, come on now, Dahlia, you're not still fussing about *that*, are you?"

“You’re damned right I’m still fussing,” she said while meeting the captain’s stern gaze.

“We can’t have a repeat of what happened during the last leg, Captain.”

Dahlia immediately regretted showing up the captain in front of his officers, for, aside from being the master of the vessel, Jesper Sverge had long been her champion.

“Manuel’s a good kid. He just needs to find his sea legs.” His response was authoritative, but not chastising.

“I’m sorry for my tone, Captain,” Dahlia had softened her intonation, “but we do need to be careful with that guy. I know we couldn’t prove Lopez did anything wrong last time, but he certainly was our prime suspect.”

She then directed her comments at one of the younger officers, Carl Kovacs. “I know you like Manuel, but I’m the one who has to make things right when someone screws up. So, if there’s one more incident, I won’t have any choice but to notify the authorities and have him put off the ship at the first port we come to that has an airstrip.”

“An’ I’ve told ’em as much,” Captain Sverge sighed to accentuate his resignation.

“Just as long as we all understand the situation,” Dahlia said. Then, touching Sverge gently on the arm, she turned and left the bridge.

“Whew! Lopez had better be careful,” said the young third mate, Carl Kovacs, “or she’ll hand him his nuts for sure.”

“And one young third mate had better focus on his own damned business.” The captain’s meaning was unmistakable, and Kovacs immediately regretted his lack of discretion. Sverge waited a moment to let his words sink in. Then, to lighten the mood, he roared, “Hey, it’s bad luck to set sail in poor temper.” Placing his coffee mug down, he

noticed that Dahlia had left him a copy of the passenger manifest. Holding it up to make a point to his men, Sverge said, “Come on mates, the ship’ll soon be filled with the voices of a hundred new passengers. Let’s make this a memorable voyage for ’em.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Mary Ammaq spent her entire life in the Arctic community of Kinngait, or what southern Canadians called Cape Dorset. Standing in her mukluks, Mary was nearly six full inches under five feet. Now nearly fifty years old, her shape was rounded by years of sitting and chewing on everything from muktuk to fry-bread while she worked. She was straightforward with people, but had a wonderful, hearty laugh made raspy from years of chain smoking cigarettes and an occasional cigar. Mary had been married twice and given birth to five children, two of whom were still living. Her station in life was determined several years before she entered puberty. At the age of eight, Mary accompanied her mother to the Kinngait Arts building in Cape Dorset. While touring the building with her uncle, Sammie Ammaq, Mary first set eyes on the graphic art produced by other villagers, including women like Pitaloosie Saila, Papiara Tukiki and, of course, the great Kenojuak Ashevak. From that moment on, Mary ate, slept, and breathed art. Before she was twelve, her uncle brought three of her beautiful representations of Arctic flowers to show the arts manager at Kinngait Arts. The reaction was one of instant appreciation. Therefore, long before she experienced her first dalliance with Anguttuk Mattewsie, the handsomest of the local boys, Mary was regarded as an up-and-comer by the other artisans in the community. It was Kenojuak herself who inspired the young artist to put her special vision on paper. By the time Mary gave birth to the fourth of her children, her

works were being sold all over Canada and the United States. Despite her growing fame, Mary remained a humble woman who cherished the life she had made in Kinngait.

The third leg of Adventure Canada's 2007 Arctic cruise season was to be a thematic one.

Jim Austin, noted photographer, invited several of the local Inuit artists to participate.

Mary's late father had been Jim's best friend as a child. Jim was her godfather, and the two enjoyed a special relationship. Naturally, when Jim was compiling the names of Inuit artisans to invite aboard the Explorer, Mary's name was at the top of his list. Jim prevailed over Mary's initial reticence by convincing her there would be wonderful experiences to share with her grandchild, whose birth was imminent. As the cruise began, Mary was grateful her godfather had invited her to participate. Because she spoke English, she was able to mingle with a modicum of comfort among the international passengers and crew. During the second day of the expedition, Mary remained aboard with the crew and a handful of other passengers, while most of the passengers and the guide staff went to look at wildlife on a nearby shoreline. Feeling a bit restless, Mary decided to go for a walk amidships. While she was touring, Mary saw something she immediately wished she had not. By the time the others returned, one passenger was no longer aboard the Explorer.

*Murder With a View*

Bad things do happen to dreadful people. Scott Rodman was, by most accounts, a complete jerk. From his adolescence, he was a habitual abuser of family members, friends, and acquaintances. Most were victimized by Rodman's acid tongue, others by contrived bursts of anger that frequently concluded with cowardly physical attacks on his unwary victims. He was a master of the "cheap shot" in every sense of that expression.

There were three things that octogenarian Gladys Rodman thought she would never live to see: capitalism in China, an African-American occupying the White House, and her nephew Scott's name on a wedding invitation. While Gladys felt the Chinese and Americans would eventually see the light, she determined the latter to be nearly impossible.

When the bride's father informed guests assembled at the Sanders-Rodman rehearsal dinner that the groom was nowhere to be found, perfunctory expressions of disappointment were displayed, but only by a few. From the time Darla Sanders met Scott two years earlier, she alone had been able to see that the milk of human kindness ran deep, albeit very deep, within her fiancé's veins.

These shortcomings aside, not even Scott Rodman deserved his fate, or the irony of his burial site. The latter was pure poetry.

*Whacked*

Eighty-five year old retired seaman, Martin Mudget, lived alone near the shore of Little Harbor, south of his longtime home base in Portsmouth. He was going blind, but Martin was far from deaf. During the months since he was diagnosed with macular degeneration, Martin's excellent hearing enabled him to compensate well for the gradual, but inevitable holes developing in his central vision. On a warm spring evening, while sitting by an open window in his sun room, he became aware of voices coming from the beach across the road from his house. It was dusk, a time of the day when sounds tended to carry toward the modest, beige, clapboard house he had occupied all of his life. There was no doubt in his mind that at least two men were out walking where the sixteenth hole of the Wentworth By the Sea Country Club parallels a small strip of sand along Little Harbor.

"It's too damned dark to play golf," he told himself, "shouldn't be nobody out there."

If there was one thing Martin could do better than most people, he could discern voice patterns at a considerable distance; hence, he felt certain there were only two of them out there. Both voices sounded male. His curiosity fully piqued, Martin reached for the Bushnell binoculars he kept by the leather recliner in his sun room. Unfortunately, even with the field glasses, all he saw was a brief glimpse of two slightly blurred figures, one dressed in a bright yellow t-shirt and matching shorts, the other in a gray hooded tracksuit. Seconds after Martin spotted them, the two figures disappeared from view, hidden by a rhododendron bush his mother planted by the house in 1945, her way of commemorating the end of the second world war. The voices had ceased, and Martin sat in silence, listening. Five minutes passed before he heard a single car door close followed

by an engine being started. How he hated feeling shut out of things since the onset of his vision problems.

“*Crap*, they must have been parked behind that damned rhododendron all this time,” he groused.

Martin couldn’t shake the suspicion that something terrible had just happened.

“Why two voices and only one car door closing?” he asked himself. Martin didn’t have an answer, but couldn’t just sit there doing nothing. So, he snatched his windbreaker off of the old oak coat rack, zipped it up, then grabbed the walking stick leaning in a corner by the front door, where he’d left it hours before.

A horn blared when Martin stepped into Wentworth Road, as the blur of a black car missing him by inches. The close call gave him pause.

“Shit, maybe one of them decided to walk over to the club house. What the hell am I doin’ out here?” However, he was determined to satisfy his curiosity, one way or the other.

With the aid of his walking stick, Martin gingerly stepped through the split rail fence that paralleled the road, and made his way along the uneven surface that demarked the boundary between the beach and the neighboring golf course. For ten minutes, his search yielded nothing out of the ordinary. Finally, Martin’s flashlight beam chanced upon a pair of yellow swim trunks lying on the cart path to the side of the 16th green. A few yards away, Martin found the body of what he presumed to be a man, lying face down in the water just a short distance from the beach. Even with his restricted vision, Martin could see that the man was naked from the waste down. While attempting a closer inspection, nearly fell off of the rip rap that lined the shore between the golf course and

the narrow beach. As he flashed the flashlight's bright beam at the victim, he saw what appeared to be a silver shaft protruding from the man's buttocks.

“What the hell?” he asked himself, then stumbled toward his house and the landline he now so desperately sought.