

The Whole She-Bang 3
A collection of Canadian crime stories
by Toronto Sisters in Crime

Edited by Janet Costello

Toronto Sisters in Crime, Publisher

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Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

The Whole She-Bang 3: stories by Sisters in Crime: Canada;
edited by Janet Costello

ISBN 978-0-9880936-5-2

Detective and Mystery stories, Canadian (English). Costello,
Janet

Also issued as ISBN 978-0-9880936-2-1 and
978-0-9880936-7-6 (e-books)
Cover Art and Design by Chris Lang

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Praise For The Whole She-Bang 2

The Sisters in Crime anthologies showcase some known and many (as yet) unknown writers. This new one includes a great piece by the late much-loved Lou Allin, as well as a batch of good stories from writers Catherine Astolfo, Melodie Campbell and Jill Downie. There's humour, plenty of suspense and some real drama here and it's great for filling in those moments while you're waiting for the gravy to thicken or the potatoes to boil and you don't want to get too involved in a long book.

The Toronto Globe and Mail

In the 24 stories ... we get countless small pleasures. A story by Linda Wiken gives us a Toronto Police DI named Anne Mason whose understated but shrewd style would make her welcome in a whole novel. Susan Daly presents a juicy story of confrontations between characters based on Rob Ford and Margaret Atwood. Elizabeth Hosang's story examines the possibilities of justifiable homicide in the case of two neighbours who have different ideas about gardens. Enough other treats along similar lines make the collection a Sisterly success.

The Toronto Star

For my Dad, Stan Tench, the first to show me that you can take what some consider a hobby, apply your strengths to it and make it an integral part of your life.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the members of the Toronto Chapter of Sisters in Crime. Your volunteer work, for more than twenty years, has provided inspiration, support and motivation for so many.

Thank you to Dorothy Birtalan, Linda Cahill, Teri Dixon, Deanna Dunn, Kate Freiman, Robin Harlick, Jeannette Harrison, Nathan Hartley, Rayna Jolley, Lesley Mang, Arlene McCarthy, Helen Nelson, Steve Shrott, Renate Simon, all Sisters to this project. Your countless hours volunteered, accepting the stories, judging, proof-reading, fact-checking, editing, providing legal help, formatting and marketing this anthology are very much appreciated.

Thank you to Chris Lang, our new and exciting cover artist.

Janet Costello

Janet Costello is a long-time supporter of short mystery fiction. When she isn't earning her living to finance a steady supply of quality reading materials, she is watching films, doting on her cats, Audrey and Humphrey, or spending quality time with friends. The Whole She-Bang 3 is the third anthology she's edited. Janet's next project? She is co-chair for the Toronto Bouchercon in 2017.

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Introduction

by Lesley Mang
Chapter President, Toronto Sisters in Crime

This collection of stories continues the tradition of excellent writing, intriguing plotting, and splendid characters shown in our first two anthologies. We do indeed have a deep well of talent to draw on in producing this new book. And that well is by no means exhausted.

The rules we established when we produced our first anthology were applied here. Again, we did not establish a firm number to be included and the judging was blind. The judges selected stories they thought deserved to be published.

Here are twenty-two stories for your reading pleasure. A few of the authors have appeared in the previous collections, *The Whole She-Bang* and *The Whole-She Bang 2*, but there are many new voices, some published for the first time.

In these stories you will read about the seminal relationships in human experience and how they go awry. Many of the stories feature conflict in families: sibling rivalry, marital infidelity, parent/child disagreement, marital and parental abuse. Other stories focus on academic, business and sports rivalry, power struggles between women and the men who want to control them. Some feature the frightening abuse of strangers and the depravity of sexual jealousy.

You'll meet a wide range of unusual characters: a shoplifter with a proven technique for getting away with it, a betrayed wife who uses her rival as a murder weapon, an amateur crook whose self-indulgence leads to his demise, a resident of a seniors' home who is fed up with being treated like a child, an innocent young girl who inadvertently witnesses a murder, a hockey player with good reasons to kill his rival, a young academic accused of murdering an older colleague with whom she has had an affair, a good Samaritan who unwittingly stumbles on a murderer. And of course there are many more.

The quality of the storytelling is outstanding. You'll find all the hallmarks of excellent writing, fine description, irony and humour in the plots and characters. And satisfying conclusions to fraught situations.

Congratulations to all of the authors for their fine stories. We hope that this sample of your work leads to many readers in the future.

Again this anthology was produced in record time (under a year) by a team of volunteers who put in hundreds of hours collecting, judging, editing, proofreading, formatting and planning a marketing strategy. A very big thank you to all of them.

And a very big thank you to Sisters in Crime, a volunteer organization devoted to promoting the recognition of female writers of crime fiction, for inspiring this collection.

Steve's Story **by Cathy Ace**

Cathy Ace was born and raised in Swansea, South Wales and immigrated to Canada in 2000. She uses her knowledge of the cultures, history, art and food she encountered during decades of travel in The Cait Morgan Mysteries—a series of traditional closed-circle mysteries featuring a globetrotting professor of criminal psychology. Ace's other series is set in her native Wales; The WISE Enquiries Agency Mysteries feature four female PIs, one of whom is Welsh, one Irish, one Scottish and one English. They tackle quirky British cases from their base at a Welsh stately home set in the rolling countryside of Powys. Cathy lives in British Columbia, where her ever-supportive husband and two chocolate Labradors make sure she's able to work full-time as an author, and enjoy her other passion—gardening. Bestselling author Ace won the 2015 Bony Blithe Award for Best Canadian Light Mystery.

Steve found the kind words and sympathetic glances bestowed upon him while he sat shiva for his father a lot tougher to stomach than bashing in the old man's skull with a crowbar. True, battering him to death in their diamond-cutting studio had been upsetting, and pretty messy, but it had allowed him to instantly achieve his goal of an independent and wealthy future, so he'd put his mind to the job and had powered on through.

Compared with those few, strangely exhilarating moments, the seven days of mourning seemed endless. His mother having died when he was just eleven years old, Steve's Aunt Rebecca assumed the role of chief supplier of food for those who arrived at his late father's home to pay their respects. He wasn't surprised to see all the women arrive with more platters of edibles when they accompanied their husbands, and dragged their suitably-dressed children, to sit still and somber in the darkened, claustrophobic rooms his father had called home for almost fifty years. By the sixth day, there was no space left in his father's fridge, and the freezer was overflowing. When the final services were held, he cleared out the disgusting messes squashed into tubs or flattened beneath plastic-wrap on disposable plates, and headed back to his own house.

Once there, he luxuriated in the longest shower of his life and

indulged in a fresh blade for his razor. He found the entire process to be liberating in a way far beyond that which he'd originally imagined. It was like a little rebirth, as a rich orphan.

The police investigation had been fruitless, as he'd planned. The cops theorized his father had opened the workshop's security door for the unknown assailant; the best they could come up with was someone dressed as a delivery guy had managed to gain access that way. They believed the attacker had broken the old man's hands in an attempt to make him give up the combination to the company's safe which his father had bravely, if foolishly, not done. He'd then crushed the almost-octogenarian's skull in a fit of anger, but failed to remove the safe from its housing, or to open it, so had left, empty-handed, after completely destroying the security cameras and everything they'd recorded. There were no substantive forensics at the scene and no stolen goods to track, so the case remained open, but without any real leads. The cops had been surprisingly gentle when dealing with Steve, who'd discovered he was able to cry at will as he'd opened the safe for them to prove the business's stock of gems was still stored, untouched, inside.

He made a heartfelt plea on the local television news channels for anyone who knew anything to come forward with information, and he, together with his family's synagogue for the past seventy years, even put up a reward as an encouragement for people to do so.

After a month of following up on tips that produced nothing of consequence, the cops regretfully hinted they might never discover the perpetrator. The Family Support Unit's offer of grief counselling was something Steve thought it better to decline, but he'd been gratified by the very real sense of frustration he witnessed when the lead detective on his father's case had shaken him warmly by the hand and had encouraged him to try to move on with his life.

Steve wasn't ever suspected because everyone knew he'd been horribly sick with the flu at the time. He'd made sure his cover story would hold up by carefully laying the groundwork. He'd called his doctor's office to arrange for the delivery of flu medication and had prepared dozens of used tissues to dump on the floor beside his sofa where he'd set up a makeshift bed in which he'd slept, with hot water bottles to make him good and sweaty, for a few days. He'd even posted a couple of photographs of a thermometer showing his 101.7 degree temperature on Facebook. The most painful part of the whole thing had been gouging the edges of his lips to form scabs that looked like cold sores, and rubbing the skin from his nostrils

with an emery board to make sure they looked good and raw when he blearily answered the knock at the door to be informed of his father's demise. When he swooned and collapsed—sweating profusely from the laps he'd been running around his kitchen, then peeled open his eyes—red from the lemon juice he'd rubbed into them, he knew the reactions he saw meant he'd convinced the cops he was extremely sick. Far too sick to have been out and about, let alone bashing in his own beloved father's skull.

Doing the deed itself had involved several calculated risks, but had turned out to be a breeze. It was winter, so almost dark by 4 p.m., and he'd snuck out of the back of his house appearing shorter than usual by hunching over his tall six-three frame, wearing a ball cap pulled down over his eyes, a scarf wrapped around his face and bulky outer clothing, the bloodstained layer of which he'd removed at the scene and stuffed into a bag that he'd carried home. He knew his father wouldn't be missed until he didn't show up for evening prayers, and even then it would take some time for him to be found because no one would go to check on him until after the services, and they'd likely start at his house before going to his workshop.

There wasn't anywhere else to look—the old man's entire life revolved around his workshop, synagogue and home. Steve counted on the process giving him a few hours to get rid of the evidence, clean himself up and prepare for the inevitable knock at his door, which it did. He burned everything he'd worn to do the job in the fireplace upon his return, while he allowed the crowbar to sit in the dishwasher for two full cycles before making it grubby again with some grease and tossing it back into the toolbox in his garage.

While the police on TV shows used every type of technology available, and some that wasn't, to check alibis and reveal suspects, in real life they didn't do any such thing—something he'd learned from talking to a couple of off-duty cops who hung out at a bar he sometimes dropped into after work. If he was honest, it was this insight that had started him thinking about how he could get rid of his father. Indeed, he reckoned it was partly the fault of those two detectives that he'd done it at all, because, without their curse-laden condemnation of the way forensics work was portrayed in fiction, it would never have occurred to him that he could have gotten away with it.

If only his father had handed the business over to him as he had promised when he was forty, or even when he'd turned fifty, he might never have so much as contemplated killing him. However, Steve could see the old man had no intention of retiring, and

certainly didn't have the good grace to die, so he'd decided to help him on his way and get his hands on what was rightfully his—what he was owed—while he still had the energy to enjoy it. It had taken him half a year to think it all through, but it had been time well spent, and he'd even begun to relish the grim enjoyment of looking across the workbench at the man he could visualize crumpling beneath his blows one day soon.

Some weeks after the official mourning period ended, friends and extended family members began to urge Steve—who'd eaten hardly a thing for weeks, and was looking decidedly peaky—to get away; their shared sentiments were that the whole thing had been a terrible tragedy, a huge shock to his system, and he deserved a break from everything. Of course he had to stick around while the police investigation continued to grind along, so he used the time to sort out his father's affairs, even managing to sell the house to a couple who planned to gut and flip it. All the while he made sure he told everyone who would listen he couldn't face going back to work in the place where "it" had happened. After all, he was a grieving son, so why should he be expected to return to work? No more long hours spent hunched over the bench for him, peering through lenses so strong they made his eyes water. No more knowing his father would scream at him for the tiniest miscalculation in a facet, or striving for unacknowledged perfection every second of each tedious day.

Eventually, Steve let it be known he was going to take a cruise, and a few of his great-aunts were surprised when he told them he planned to travel to China, via the Caribbean, Panama Canal, Hawaii, the Polynesian Islands and Australia. It would be a three-month trip that demanded pretty much an entire closet full of new clothes, not only because he'd lost so much weight—the effect of the shock and grief, of course—but also since he'd booked a suite on one of the most exclusive cruise lines to sail the seas; that was a little detail he chose to keep to himself.

"Penny for them," whispered a breathy voice close to Steve's ear as he stood at the rail watching the ship's wake foam in the turquoise waters off Cartagena.

The sun was hot on his back and the wind ruffled his neatly trimmed hair as he turned. "Ah, Barb." He smiled.

A first-time cruiser like himself, Barb had been assigned the same dinner table as Steve for this part of the journey; he'd elected

to share his meal-times with other cruisers because, after all, he was a single man in his fifties, travelling alone, and could do with some companionship.

A somewhat naive and impressionable woman, only just into her forties, Steve had decided to make the most of the chance handed to him by Fate; Barb was also cruising alone but was only booked to sail as far as San Diego, where she lived. He aimed to win her over long before that, and have some real fun. He liked that she was short—he preferred them compact; it made him feel even more of a man. A pocket-Venus was just his type. Raven-haired too. Perfect.

He allowed his eyes to slide down her desirable body in its form-fitting outfit as he sucked in his paunch and straightened his spine to realize his full, and considerable, height. “Just thinking about... you know....” Steve bit his lip and squeezed out a tear.

Barb looked up at him, her heart-shaped face distraught. She touched his arm gently, sending a shiver of anticipation through Steve’s eager loins. “I’m sorry,” she said huskily. “Of course, your poor father. I know you said last night how much he would have enjoyed sharing this trip with you. He must be filling your thoughts. I apologize, I didn’t mean to bother you.”

Steve wiped his wet cheek, then took the woman’s hand in his own, her flesh feeling cool and pliable between his sweating palms. “Don’t worry. No bother at all. I’m happy to have some company. Stay?”

Barb’s dark, limpid eyes were full of sympathy. “Whatever you want,” she said meekly.

The previous night at dinner, Steve had told Barb about his much-loved father, and his tragic loss. He’d wondered afterward if he’d maybe talked up the size of their business a little too much, but he wanted to impress her with his wealth, and let her know he could afford to spend a little on her while they shared each other’s company aboard. Barb had been tremendously supportive. She was a wonderful listener. And that body? She didn’t even know how good-looking she was, and she was also still reeling from ending an unhappy relationship. Perfect. Ripe for the picking.

Of course Steve knew there couldn’t be anything long-term between them because she was from the west coast and he from the east, but he had decided to put some effort into overcoming her defences, and make the most of his opportunities. He suggested a Piña Colada in his suite away from the heat of the late afternoon, and where they could enjoy the view of the sunset from his private

deck. If he got her started on the cocktails early enough, he reckoned this would be the night she'd respond to his advances.

The news of Steve's disappearance from a cruise ship somewhere off the coast of Colombia sent shockwaves around the synagogue he'd attended his entire life. Both men in one family gone in less than three months? It was a great loss to the community. It was some time before the lawyers finally got around to opening the safe built into the floor of the workshop Steve had inherited from his father, and confusion reigned when it was found to be empty. Everyone in the small diamond-cutting community was aware the gems his father had owned at the time of his death had never been sold on or liquidated, and they certainly weren't in the safety deposit box the company had used. Diligent searches throughout the banking community failed to uncover the stones in any of their storage facilities. They had disappeared.

For weeks rumours circulated about the value of the stock stolen from the workshop, and the cops finally released a figure of six million dollars to the press. It was generally agreed Steve would have been sensible to remove the diamonds to the safety of a bank's vault before he'd headed off on his trip, but it was also widely acknowledged he'd probably been too grief-stricken to have been thinking rationally at the time. Quiet conversations among groups of saddened men after prayer meetings suggested he'd also probably been lulled into a false sense of security by knowing his father had invested not only in a building that was accessible through just one door, which the thief had somehow managed to open and relock, but also in the world's least-crackable safe. Heads nodded knowingly as all agreed that if only Steve had reinstated the broken security cameras smashed at the time of his father's murder, the cops might have had more than they did to go on—which was nothing.

Barb, aka Bree, aka Bella, reckoned the diamonds she'd liberated from Steve's safe could comfortably finance her for the next few years or so, cruises included, even though she'd had to shift them for a fraction of their real worth. Half a dozen voyages in the past eighteen months had taught her you couldn't possibly guess whom you'd meet aboard those sumptuous floating palaces, or what they might tell you over dinner. She'd also learned a well-kept

figure, a cleverly adopted persona, and a readiness to listen could produce great opportunities for the right sort of woman.

Before meeting Steve she'd relied on a few variations upon a couple of themes. She'd selected her mark, then justified her presence on the ship by claiming to have won the trip as a prize in a charity lottery that she'd been unable to exchange for cash—something she'd have preferred. Eventually she'd let the man in question draw out of her a heart-wrenching tale about a desperately sick mother who needed cash to pay for life-saving surgery (that one was usually good for up to twenty grand) or the one about the addicted, violent man who was stalking and threatening her so she had to disappear, leaving everything behind. A couple of times she'd been able to drag almost twenty-five grand out of men with that one, and once she'd even scored a pick-up truck.

In any case, as she inevitably ended up rolling around with them in their cabins letting them do whatever they wanted to her—which was usually very little, and almost always pathetically predictable—she told herself it was better than turning tricks in parked cars or cheap motels, and the payout was not only a great deal more rewarding, but all her own; no pimp to share it with, no cops to pay off to allow her to stay on the streets.

With Steve, it had been different. She'd met him at the dinner table the first night out and right away she'd spotted he was too cheap to part with any cash, however good her story might be. But when he'd boasted to her about what he and his late father had done for a living, she'd known he was the best mark to ever fall into her highly accommodating lap. All she had to do was keep him talking until he gave her what she wanted. And he had, of course. It made her laugh that his father had used his only son's birthdate as the combination to the safe where he kept all their gems, and she'd waited patiently for Steve to invite her to his accommodations. They always did. Once there, she'd easily talked him into showing her his passport photo, which had allowed her to see his birthdate, and she'd even managed to lift his keys without him being any the wiser. Then she'd been ready to put the rest of her plan into action. At least, that was what she'd hoped. Sadly, things hadn't gone exactly as she'd envisaged.

As she sat in her condo overlooking San Diego Harbor painting her nails, she tried to work out what it had been about Steve that had revolted her. She'd done so much with, and for, so very many men over the years that it unsettled her to realize she couldn't work out why this particular one—an otherwise unassuming man with a

paunch and bad breath—had made her skin crawl when he merely brushed against her. She'd seen pretty much every emotion from lust, to shame, to anger and even disgust in the eyes of men, but in Steve's all she'd seen was a blankness that filled her soul—assuming she still had one, of course—with dread. It had been like looking into the eyes of a shark; nothing there at all. Of all the men she'd known, he was the only one who'd freaked her out a little. And she didn't know why.

Maybe that was why she'd pushed him. She certainly hadn't planned it, and it hadn't even been much of a push. He'd been cavorting about on the oh-so private deck leading from his suite at the aft of the ship, plying her with cocktails while he showed off his woeful dance moves, then he'd lunged for her. She'd given him no more than a little shove. He'd half-pirouetted before his tall, heavy frame had tipped over the rail that was only hip-high to him, disappearing into the churning sea below. He'd fallen silently, and it had been dark. There wasn't even a splash. She'd left his suite without anyone knowing she'd been there, and had been gratified it had taken almost two days for anyone to realize he wasn't on the ship any longer. Even then they didn't make a fuss about it. Indeed, it made her wonder how often people simply vanished from cruise ships without it being widely reported.

Despite this one little hitch, Barb had pressed on with her overall scheme: she'd headed east on the first possible flight, used Steve's keys and then the combination to get what she wanted, and hadn't been spotted by a soul. Besides, who would notice a short, rotund, bald guy wearing a hoodie and jeans in that sort of area? She'd sliced the latex bald-cap into tiny pieces, dropping bits into garbage cans all around the museum district the next day, and she'd dropped off the clothes she'd worn at a charity shop. She was out of the city seventy-two hours later with a purse full of tickets to local attractions in case anyone in a uniform asked why she'd made such a long trip for such a short time. She'd mixed the gems in with a collection of glass beads she'd bought at one of those stores so popular with folks who liked to make their own jewelry, and she'd even picked up a couple of magazines about arts and crafts to support her tale about being a fanatical fabricator of all things glitzy if anyone questioned her. They didn't.

Barb flicked through the glossy brochure she'd brought home from the ship. Where next she wondered? Transatlantic? Or the Panama Canal again? Always rich pickings there—men ticking off a bucket list item and more interested in engineering than women.

Sad little men realizing time was running out. Easy marks. It wasn't as though she needed the money, but she truly enjoyed the travel. And the inventing of a new backstory. But she told herself she didn't want to become mixed up in more than one disappearance at sea—that was the sort of thing it was easy to spot and cops, of whatever type, might be dumb, grasping, and untrustworthy, but they usually caught on to a pattern, as they'd told her in so much pillow talk over the decades. No, it was back to the old stories for Barb; she'd gotten away with it once, but twice? That would be pushing it.

Ha! *Pushing it!* She laughed at her own little joke as she picked up the phone to call the cruise line.

Power Play

By J. A. Menzies

While J. A. Menzies would hate to stumble on a real body under any circumstances, she has a thing about noticing the “perfect” locations for finding mythical bodies. In order not to waste this fascinating (and hopefully, unusual) skill, she decided to write mysteries. Her stories, including the Paul Manziuk & Jacquie Ryan Mysteries, are set in Canada and feature intriguing settings, compelling characters, and intricate, dynamic plots. Reviewers, including Publishers Weekly, have compared her novels to the best of Agatha Christie and Georgette Heyer. Library Journal called her a “master of plotting.” J. A. Menzies lives in Markham, Ontario, and is a member of Sisters in Crime, Crime Writers of Canada, The Word Guild, and The Writers Union of Canada.

For a short time last winter, I thought I’d found a little bit of heaven right here in Toronto. Then came the Monday morning when our general manager traded two first-round draft picks and backup goalie Page Bryant, one of my best friends in the entire world, for much-sought-after forward Denny Callaghan and a young goalie from Calgary. Bubble popped.

When I arrived at the rink that morning, Coach McGee told me Denny would take my spot on the first line, and I’d centre the second line. I’d known that from the minute I heard about the trade so, while it hurt, it wasn’t unexpected. And since I was twenty-eight, not eighteen, I was used to the fact that hockey is a business. Trades happen. So do moves up and down the line-up. And although I’d been playing well and the team was winning, we needed a boost to get us into contention for the Stanley Cup. So, if the only thing Denny’s arrival had affected was my job as a hockey player, I could have lived with it. But there was more to come.

What can I say about Tami Stafford that hasn’t been said many times before about Cleopatra, Helen of Troy, Mona Lisa and a lot of other beautiful women? I met her at a charity event for a women’s shelter. She was one of the event organizers. While I was signing “Blessings, Miles Borden,” a couple of hundred times, I was thinking about skin the colour of a pecan, silky black curls, and dark eyes that made me want to leap tall buildings. Yeah, I had it bad.

At the end of the evening, Tami thanked me for coming. If anyone from the press had been watching, the headline would have read, "Tongue-tied hockey player ensnared by local beauty."

And ensnared I was. From that moment, I began to think about settling down. Wife, kids, house in the suburbs, dog, bikes in the driveway... the whole nine yards.

The day the trade for Denny came down, I was actually getting up my nerve to propose to her. But with all the hoopla, extra practice, and so forth, I didn't see or speak with Tami that day. Just a quick text to say I wouldn't be able to make it for our dinner date.

The next day we had a home game, and Tami was in her regular seat with the other players' wives and girlfriends. I waved, but that's about it.

Two days later, with the ring burning a hole in my pocket, I arrived at a welcome party for Denny and found Tami, her arm linked with his, laughing as if he'd just told the funniest joke in the world.

In case you haven't seen Denny Callaghan, we're talking six-foot-three, 220-pound Adonis with sculpted muscles, longish blond hair, and piercing green eyes. Plus he came with a well-deserved reputation as a first-class lady killer.

When I saw Denny with Tami that first time, the last of the air in my little happy bubble just kind of gurgled away. I forgot all about the diamond ring in my pocket.

Sure, when Tami saw me, she came over and talked to me a bit, but I'd have had to be blind not to see she was another moth caught in Denny's bright flame.

The ensuing weeks just made it more obvious. Denny had won a different kind of game without even trying. Which made me a three-time loser: my best friend, my position on the first line and my girl.

All this to explain why, when they found Denny's body, two cops came for me. One of them was an older guy with an East Indian look. He was dressed in dark jeans, a black turtleneck and a parka. The other was a petite redhead in a parka, a skirt and knee-high boots. She didn't look old enough to be out of high school.

The guy said they were with the Homicide Squad, and the redhead asked if it was true I had a grudge against Denny.

I've read thousands of crime novels and watched even more TV crime shows, so I said I wasn't opening my mouth unless my lawyer was present.

The cops acted as if my saying that meant I was guilty, but I shut

my eyes so they couldn't see the fear lurking in my baby blues.

Sitting on a hard chair in a tiny room, waiting for my lawyer, I tried to process it all. Denny was dead. And from the little I'd been told, it seemed he'd been beaten to death with a hockey stick. Unreal!

My lawyer showed up eventually, and with him there to advise me when to shut up, I told the cops half a dozen times that I knew nothing about Denny's death because I hadn't had anything to do with it. Unfortunately, I had no alibi. During the time he was killed, I was in my condo, by myself, sleeping.

Somebody told the cops that Denny had stolen my girl. I countered that Tami wasn't "my" girl; she was her own girl, and since no commitment had ever been made, she was free to do what she chose.

The cops finally told me I could go. But not before the redhead asked me for my autograph. For her nephew.

On the sidewalk outside the police station, my lawyer told me the cops hadn't charged me because they only had circumstantial evidence. The way he said it gave me chills. Like he was congratulating me on covering my tracks. I said, "How could they have concrete evidence when I didn't do it?" and he looked away.

When I got home, I called my buddy and former left winger, Nate Cannon.

"You heard?" I asked.

"I heard the cops arrested you for it," he said.

"Not yet." I sighed. "Wish I knew what's going to happen now."

"The cops will keep hanging around until they find somebody to arrest."

"You have any idea who did it?"

"It wasn't you?"

I hung up.

After kicking a pillow around the living room, I sat down. Clearly, I needed to figure out who killed Denny Callaghan before the police decided circumstantial evidence was enough. Not only did *they* think I'd done it, but so did my lawyer and apparently my teammates. Which left my parents and Tami.

I called Mom and Dad at their Florida winter home, but got no answer. Likely in the swimming pool or on the golf course. I'd made sure they both had cellphones, but I hadn't managed to convince them to carry them at all times. I left messages.

That left Tami. Never one to fail to follow through when I'd decided on a course of action, I called her. "Hi," I said casually.

“Oh, Miles!” There was a sob in her voice. “Isn’t it terrible?”

“Yeah,” I said. “Terrible.”

“He was so young and so full of life. I can’t believe anybody would do that to him. Why, Miles? Why would anybody be so cruel?”

“I don’t know.”

Tami was still talking. “They’re saying you did it, Miles. But I don’t believe that.”

“I’d hope not.”

“You didn’t, did you?”

“Not you, too?” I hung up.

I made myself a cup of strong coffee. If I wanted to stay out of jail, I’d need to figure out who really killed him. Or at least find a way to prove it wasn’t me. But how?

I realized I also needed to know what was happening with our game tomorrow. I phoned Coach McGee.

“Miles?” he said. “Where are you?”

“Where should I be?”

“I heard—well, the cops—”

“Yeah, they took me in. But since I didn’t do it, they let me leave.” Okay, a bit of a white lie. They let me leave because, as my lawyer so kindly pointed out, all they had was circumstantial evidence. “So what’s happening with the lines tomorrow?”

There was about a minute of silence. Then Coach said, “I figured you did it for the girl, not to get back on the first line.”

My third time hanging up on someone I’d phoned.

I paced around my living room. Who else had a motive? It had to be someone who could hold a stick up in front of Denny without causing him to be suspicious, or someone he’d turn his back on without a second’s thought.

Who, other than me, didn’t like Denny? No, scratch that. I didn’t *not* like Denny. I mean, I didn’t know him well enough to dislike him. I even felt kind of sorry he was dead. Sure, I wasn’t crazy about his taking my spot on the first line, but not only did he have nothing to do with the trade, he was a better player than me, and he could’ve helped us win games. The truth was, whoever killed Denny likely ended any chance we had of making the playoffs. And that sucked.

Yeah, I wasn’t happy about the fact that the girl I was about to propose to had latched onto him the minute he’d arrived, but it’s not as if she was the only girl in the world. And I hadn’t actually proposed to her yet, so who knows? She might still have said yes.

Really, when you thought about it, I had no motive for killing

him.

Who benefited from Denny's death?

In books, they look for things like money, power, and love. So, who would get his money?

I had no idea about his personal life. Resorting to Google, I found out he and his wife had divorced a year ago. No kids. Which meant that, unless his will said differently, his parents or some other family member would probably get his money.

I couldn't image the nice couple I saw in the pictures killing their son for his money. Nor his other family members. They looked so... so normal.

And it's not as if Denny was a jerk, either. He'd bought his parents a new house. He'd bought his older brother a top of the line SUV. His younger sister got a Prius. I was ready to scratch them off.

I'd need to follow up on the wife, just in case. Maybe she still got his money when he died. Or maybe the divorce wasn't enough because she really, really hated him.

I needed to find out why his wife divorced him.

Wait a minute. My buddy Page Bryant had just been traded to Calgary. Could he—would he—help me get in touch with her? Or would he, like everyone else, assume I was guilty?

I could but try.

I sent him a text. Five minutes, later, my phone rang.

"Miles?" Page's voice. I could picture him, his black eyes the size of Frisbee discs in his dark brown face. "I heard what happened. You okay?"

"So far."

"Who do they think did it?"

"Me."

"No way!"

Finally, someone who thought I wasn't a killer.

"No, but I don't have an alibi. As in I was home alone."

"Bummer. So who did it for reals?"

"No idea. That's why I'm calling you. Can you ask around and see if anyone on your team has a clue? Like did he have any enemies? Somebody with a motive? Like a teammate, or his ex-wife? Why did Calgary trade him? Why the divorce? All that stuff."

"Yeah, okay." Page's voice sounded distant. "I've got a few ideas." He took a deep breath. "Not sure how easy it will be to find out more, but I'll ask around a bit."

"Great! I can't do much about the Calgary links from here."

"Miles, how well did you get to know him since the trade?"

“Not well at all. I mean, I saw him at practices and games but we never hung out. But because he took my place on the first line, everyone seems to think that gave me a motive. And, well, Tami was kind of gaga about him, so that doesn’t help.”

“Okay, one thing I *can* tell you. He divorced his wife. Not the other way around.”

“Interesting.”

“Also, from what I’ve heard, women fell for him. Hard.”

“So was he cheating on his wife?”

“This is only hearsay so it might not be worth much, but apparently he has—had—a great line, and he didn’t seem to be able to keep himself from using it. Even after he was married. Or even if the woman was married.”

“So there might have been a few people with motives?”

“Yeah, here in Calgary,” Page said. “But he was killed in Toronto.”

“Right.”

“Unless you can find somebody who flew to Toronto recently.”

I thought for a minute. “Can you get me a few names?”

“I’ll see what I can do.”

“Thanks.”

“Hang in there, buddy.”

While talking to Page, I’d decided this had to be a long-term thing. Denny had only been in Toronto for three weeks. Too little time to make someone mad enough to kill him. It was possible that somebody who lived in Toronto had been stewing about something Denny had done a long time ago, and finally saw the chance to get even. But who? And how could I get more information?

What were the chances the cute redheaded cop who’d asked for my autograph would talk to me? When she’d first met me at police headquarters, she’d given me a card. What had I done with it? Not in my wallet.

I have a bad habit of stuffing things like receipts and other stuff in the back left pocket of my jeans. Sure enough, it was there. Crumpled, but there.

The card read “Detective Constable Jennifer Lindsay,” and there was an email address and a phone number.

I texted her. *Would you and your nephew like to have supper with me?*

Ten minutes later, she responded. *My nephew can’t make it, but*