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# *Murder* *in the* *Great Big* *Playground*

A TALE OF REAL ESTATE, MURDER,  
POLITICS AND REALLY GREAT POWDER

A COLLECTIVE NOVEL





This novel is the product of a collaboration between 10 individual writers and 10 individual artists.

It was also made possible by the partnership of Bob and Kathy Barnett who, in founding the Pique newsmagazine over a decade ago, allowed their independent local newsmagazine to be a platform for hundreds of artists and writers from this community.

In the spirit of paying deep attention to those we embark on adventures with, and to joyful collaboration, we dedicate this Collective Novel to the memory of  
Kathy Barnett.



CHAPTER ONE  
BY CINDY FILIPENKO

*M*inerva “Minty” St. James was AWOL. Her usual seat at The Girls’ table at the Mallard Room was empty for the first time in nearly five years. Not that the other “girls”— a group of women who were pushing 60 — really minded. No one really remembered how Minty, the self-styled “realtors’ realtor”, had ended up joining their group of fundraising all-stars, but all agreed she tended to be a pain in the ass. “I haven’t heard from her in days,” said Jean Jones, who admittedly had done nothing to chase her down.

Jean, who had the most imitated highlight/lowlight bob of any local, also had the distinction of being the ex-wife of a Whistler Council member, an SLRD representative and an MLA. She figured she was more than ready to throw her hat into the November mayoral race, and had been counting on Minty to exert her substantial influence. Not to mention, to host a few glad-handing receptions.

“I thought I would have seen Minty at the ‘Keeping Young, Keeping Fun’ Sunny Seniors’ seminar at Meadow Park,” noted Patti Peterson, sipping her third Blueberry Tea of the afternoon, figuring the green tea base would keep her personal trainer mollified about the amount of booze she quaffed before 3 o’clock. “Maybe she was with her mystery man this weekend,” suggested Jean.

“Has she told anyone who he is?” “Some kid in his 30s. He’s a builder or a planner or something... I fired off a bunch of names, but she wasn’t biting,” said Carly Hughes, toying with her empty espresso cup. “All she wanted to talk about was her plan to build a staff housing compound in Pemberton. Kind of like a warehouse for Aussies with a shuttle to Whistler every two hours.”

“She never told me about that,” sniffed Patti Peterson. Patti’s husband, Ralph, had made it big covering Vancouver and Sun Peaks with cheaply made condos supported by ironclad contracts that always left the owners holding the bag.

Carly sighed. Patti’s constant jockeying to find a way to add more money to the Peterson millions was tiring. It was so un-Whistler. And Carly knew Whistler. As only a one-time clerk of the Municipality, co-founder of the Garden Club, and on-call Critical Incident Stress Debriefing could.

Love her or hate her — and mostly people loved her — everyone agreed that Carly Hughes was as consistent as an American Thanksgiving mountain opening and locals who only dined out during the shoulder season’s cheap specials. She was a legend.

As she contemplated ordering another espresso machiatto (she loved the way the baristas made the froth resemble a relief of Whistler and Blackcomb) she considered the fact that nobody had heard from Minty in four days — a record — and it crossed Carly’s mind that perhaps Minty might be missing. Maybe it was worth calling Hiroshi at Search and Rescue. She quickly dismissed the thought as a side effect of watching too much Without A Trace and not properly having processed the last on-mountain tree-well death, and got down to the delicate business at hand.

“I’ve been thinking about your idea, Patti — I’m not sure that fondue boats are the best dinner concept for a fundraiser for the sewerage station...”

*As* The Girls were working out how to sell naming rights to the Waste Water Treatment Plant without agitating the local chapter of Whistler Water Watch, Hiroshi Steinberger was dropping his helicopter into a hover over the upper Joffre Lake. A vivid splash of red on the stark white snow had stopped him in his tracks. And though the film production house who’d hired him to scout for locations for the grizzly bear chase scene in their Lost in Alaska movie were expecting his call pronto, the volunteer SAR in him overrode commercial considerations. He dropped his altitude. He could make out the shape of a human being. He brought the machine into land.

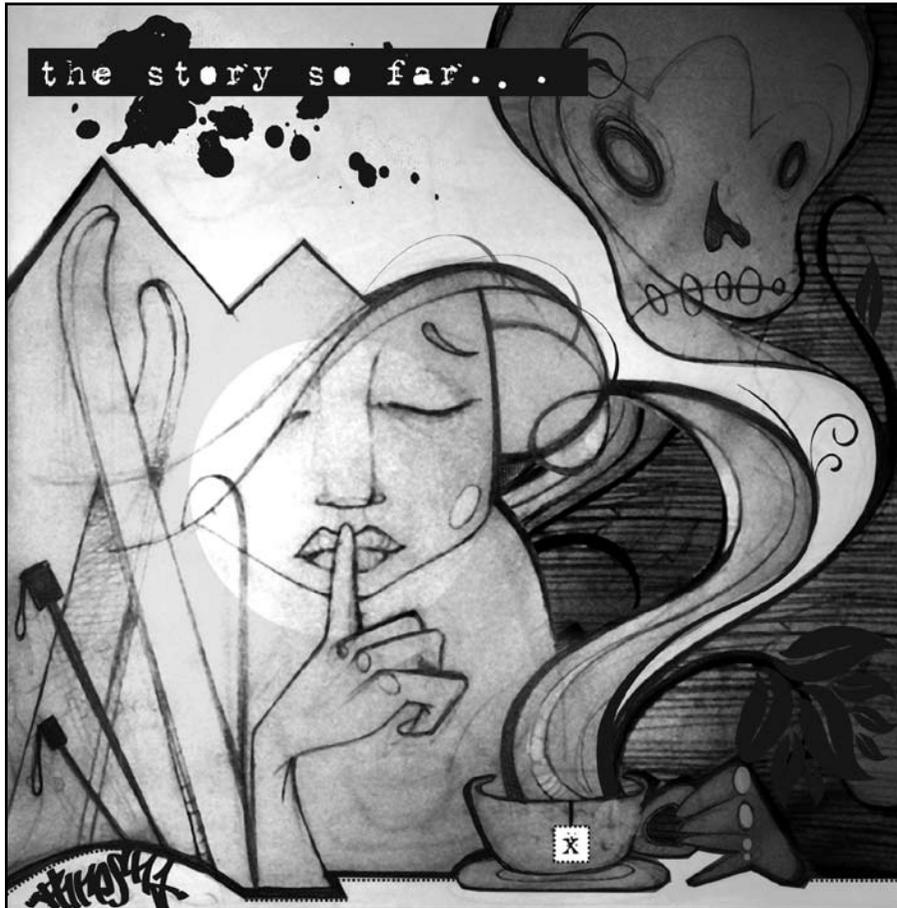


ILLUSTRATION BY PHRESHA LE VANDALÉ

As he stood over the body of a man who appeared to be in his mid-30s, Hiroshi gasped. It wasn’t the amount of blood on the snow the pilot found shocking, it was the fact that someone had stuffed purple potatoes into the dead man’s mouth, contorting his face so grotesquely that Hiroshi could barely recognize him.

But when he saw the pearl-covered iPhone, he knew. He’d flown the dude up and down the Valley months before, as Chuck “Mess-up” Jessup snapped photos of the lay of the land on his iPhone, made phone calls to his “business partners” and scribbled notes to himself.

Hiroshi, like most of Pemberton’s post-1990 population, was a Whistler real estate refugee. But flying enough missions with the local search and rescue chapter had caught him up to speed on the local lore, and he knew snippets of the Jessup family history, enough to know that it had rained snails when the family’s slow-talking patriarch, Spuds Jessup, died. And enough to know old Spuds would be a-rolling in his grave if he could see his fast-talking grandson mentally dividing up the 5th generation family land, able to sniff out a few investment dollars as easily as a lounge lizard could find a girl with low self-esteem during last call at Buffalo Bill’s.

Chuck “Mess-up” Jessup claimed to be a land developer, but the only thing he’d managed to develop so far was an ulcer - constant battles in the courts, the Municipal Council chambers and the parking lot of the Pony Espresso took their toll. Mess-up survived by playing the margins, skewing the angles and generally avoiding using any of his own money in his questionable business deals. Not that there was all that much money left after the old man died. All they had was land — hundreds of acres that some wag in Victoria had decided would forever be condemned to growing potatoes. And if there was anything Chuck Jessup had hated more than Victoria bureaucrats during his 36 years on earth, it had been potatoes.

*The* din by the airport baggage carousel made it nearly impossible to hear, but Janna St. James hit the redial on her cell phone anyway.

Her grandmother’s voicemail, again. “Gammy Minty. This is the seventh message that you haven’t answered. When we were in Calgary for Christmas, you seemed happy that I was coming to visit. So could you answer... the

damn... phone???" Finally, the tall, blonde, aerodynamically-proportioned teenager saw what she'd been waiting for — her skis. She snapped her phone shut, and grabbing the 250 cm boards, headed for the Perimeter bus. If she couldn't track down Gammy, she'd just chain herself to the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games information centre in the village and start her hunger strike. That would show the world what fascists the IOC were. But first, she'd pick up a box of Timbits for the bus ride.

*R*ory McDougall broke down in sobs at Tapley's when he found out Chuck had been found dead at Joffre Lake. They had been boyhood pals until Rory got serious about snowboarding. Ten years and 20 pounds ago, Rory had made it all the way to the Olympics. But things hadn't panned out, and since nobody wanted an Olympic motivational speaker without an actual medal, he had spent most of the last decade driving a backhoe for the muni.

As he sipped his Kokanee, Rory noticed the logo for the 2010 Olympic Games on a sign in the village. He had an idea that could help him lose the nickname "The No-Go at Nagano" and honour Chuck's short life — but first he had to finish his beer.



CHAPTER TWO  
BY GRANT STODDARD

*A*s the Perimeter bus rolled past Creekside, Minty St. James' unequivocally favored grandchild girded her loins. Somewhere just south of Squamish Janna had, for the first time, begun to entertain the idea that something truly awful had happened. The surgically-tautened matriarch was well-known for her flightiness but going off the radar for this long was simply beyond the pale. As she grabbed her skis, backpack and began walking briskly towards Minty's Painted Cliff condo, Janna self-soothed with the knowledge that her grandmother was at her most vital and in the rudest of health. Since her husband Teddy St. James had passed in 2002, Minty had declared a personal jihad on the aging process and had been making serious headway. Unbeknownst to Janna, her grandmother had been simultaneously dating a cosmetic surgeon, nutritionist and personal trainer and had put their combined skill and know-how to good use. When they were together, the vivacious sexagenarian would be commonly mistaken for Janna's mother; an occurrence that would make them both beam and giggle with mischievous delight.



ILLUSTRATION BY KATIE GREEN

“Gammy?” she said after a loud rap on the door came to no issue. “Gammy Minty, it’s Janna!”

“Looking for your grandma, eh?” said a shrill woman’s voice from behind Janna, startling her somewhat.

“Uh...yeah,” she said regaining her composure. “Have you seen her?”

“Just when I came to clean last,” said the mousy woman, who produced a key from her pocket and opened the door. “She ain’t here, darlin’. Said that she’d be out of town for a few days, didn’t say where. I recognize you from your pictures. Such a pretty young thing. Why don’t you come in and warm up?”

Kindly house-cleaner, Barb McCann, was 10 years Minty’s junior but a

hardscrabble life had etched deep-lines in her face. Janna followed her into the grandiose foyer and headed straight for the bathroom; she’d had a premonition of Minty falling in her antique claw-foot tub or state-of-the-art steam-shower and banging her head. The coltish debutante partially covered her eyes with her fingers and gently pushed open the door. She found nothing untoward and signed with relief. She darted up to the master bedroom to ensure that Minty hadn’t passed in her sleep.

She was again greeted by an empty space where her grandmother’s dead or dying body wasn’t. Of course Gammy wouldn’t go like that, thought the 19-year-old phenom and smiled weakly. On numerous occasions Minty had confided in Janna that she wished to shrug off her mortal coil at 100 years old with “the sun on my face, a drink in my hand and a strapping young buck on my arm!”

“Did ya hear about Chuck Jessup?” wheezed Barb as she ascended the stairs with audible effort.

Janna wasn’t listening. Her big watery blue eyes had scanned from the empty bed to the glossy, walnut armoire. On it sat Minty’s wallet, keys, cell phone and passport.

“Nice and tidy in here,” said Barb as she joined Janna in the room. “Looks like she hasn’t been here since Thursday. Usually it looks like the Fitz Slump spilled through the window!”

Barb followed Janna’s eyes to the grand dames’ personal affects. “Oh dear,” Barb said, gravely.

*A*s Rory McDougall piled up more icy flotsam from three days of non-stop snowfall, his grief turned to anger. He and Chuck had shared similar life trajectories and his old friend’s killing had brought his own hapless descent into sharper focus. The pair had been cocksure teens, each destined to make their mark; Rory in racking up snowboarding Golds, Chuck in the maverick expansion of the family business. Just a decade ago neither would have fathomed failure; couldn’t have conceived of being snickeringly referred to by that failure ever after. They’d been equally reckless through the years; acquiring vices, breaking hearts and alienating

many along the way. But whereas Rory had quietly accepted his alcoholic oblivion some years ago, Chuck Jessup was going down swinging; betting the diminished remainder of his family's fortune along with other people's money on a series of long-shots. As Rory took another swig of Crown Royal from the monogrammed silver hip-flask he got for his 21st birthday, he flicked through his mental rolodex – people who Jessup had been characteristically careless with. The list was as long as the line-up in front of the Village Gondola on a snowy Saturday morning. He knew of Chuck's numerous lascivious liaisons, up to and including Minty St. James. Rory was initially stunned by this latest development as Jessup's typical targets were the latest hires at the Amsterdam – young, pretty, barely clothed and blissfully unaware of his reputation as a bad luck magnet. When they were still on their respective winning streaks, Rory and Chuck had been friends with Minty's son Alex. Ever since they witnessed a svelte and bikinied 40-something Minty at the beach-cookout she'd thrown at Lost Lake for Alex's graduation, they'd both been besotted with her, even made attempts at clumsily flirting with her, while her husband Teddy manned the grill. It was on this day that Chuck claimed to have coined the term "cougar".

Chuck had given Minty a wide berth in the years after Teddy St. James' untimely death. Teddy had fallen foul of Jessup's hypnotic patter and had lost millions on what was pitched as a "no-brainer." Teddy's heart attack, Minty had told the girls at the Mallard room some months later, was brought on by the money-pit. Chuck and Minty's semi-clandestine, inter-generational coupling had been going on since mid-November to the best of Rory's hazy knowledge and he figured that all had been forgiven.

Rory spotted Hiroshi Steinberger headed for Citta's and jumped out of his backhoe's cab.

"Oh Rory," he said with a consolatory thin smile. "I'm so sorry."

"Yeah," said the blurry-eyed could-a-been and looked off into the distance.

"They've given me a few days off," said Hiroshi. "I'm more shaken up than I thought I'd be. I mean, I've seen some stuff in my day but this....this was truly gruesome. I mean, you heard about the taters, eh?"

Over a beer Hiroshi – who knew Rory quite well and Chuck in passing –

attested to some breaks with procedure in the fledgling investigation.

"It was clearly a murder, eh," he said after they knocked back shots in Chuck's memory. "But I was told to take the body...I mean Chuck, down right away. They treated it like a backcountry accident, not a crime scene. Only today did it begin to gnaw on me that they'd need a forensics crew over there. With this blizzard, there'll be nothing left to investigate."

Rory shook his head and thought back to the long list of people who'd want rid of his compadre.

"Hiroshi?" said a voice emanating from inside the helicopter pilot's jacket taking them both by surprise. Though he was officially off the clock, Hiroshi had kept his CB radio on.

"This is Hiroshi, Sarah, what's up?" he said.

"We have Janna St. James here at HQ," said the tinny voice. "She says that Minty's missing. We need all birds up for a sweep and I can't get a hold of Bruce. Can you do it? I'm sorry about this..."

"I'll be up in 15," sighed Hiroshi and mouthed the words 'double espresso' to the bartender. "Over and out."

"Geez, all hell's breaking loose," said the pilot and turned to his left.

The bar stool next to him was empty and spinning; Rory McDougall was in full sprint along Village stroll.



CHAPTER THREE  
BY KEVIN DAMASKIE

*A*sweaty Chuck Jessup looks at the earth, disdain directed down at dirty hands. The dank, musty scent of the fertile Pemberton Valley soil packs his nose. Windwhipped tears cloud his eyes. He draws the sleeve of his tattered flannel shirt across his spent grey peepers and peers down at the brown-tinged, purplish object freshly yanked from this living, vital soil...“Goddam it, if I never see another potato in my life, I’ll be happy. This farm is gonna kill me,” mutters Chuck, picking up the potato and chucking it as far as he can. An audible “sploosh” brings a satisfied smile to his face, the tossed tuber tumbling down the Lillooet River, never to return to remind Chuck of his farm roots and his devious desire to harvest untold riches from this land. Never to return.

This land. The land Grandpa Spuds had inherited from his father, who had inherited it from his father... farm from father for five fairly finely fathered families. Protected by dikes. Held back. Floods which, over time, naturally built some of the most productive, isolated farmland in British Columbia. Priceless potato plantings. Revered around the globe for its end of the

road geography, sheltered from the savage and unpredictable storms of fat cat city developers and vigilant viruses, the land was prime for sustained, quality production. For the past 27 years, since the day he was born in the old farmhouse by the crook in the road, Chuck patrolled the virtual verges of this land, trying never to do anything with respect to it, disdainful of his hayseed neighbours, content with their dirty fingernails and cowshit-covered boots. He had come to resent this rich, vital soil and all it grew. Now he didn’t envision producing anything except easy money from this land. Toil and hardship at the hands of the arbitrary and oft-cruel farmer fates of weather, water, wind, bugs and soul-sucking subsidy market-based pricing had turned Chuck sour on the once-coveted role of “the next great farmer.” When he mulled over his future farm plans, none had him at the handle of a tractor pulling the olfactory offensiveness Grandpa Spuds called the “honey wagon.” In fact, Chuck pictured himself in a city – wealthy, well respected and wisely-wifed – you know, the trophy type. Honey waggin’.

“Aw, shoot,” Chuck mutters, eyes rising. Drags dirty digits down Dickies. Here comes Rory runnin’ across the field. He looks weird, fluttery.

“Don’t worry, nothin’ bad’s happened,” Rory slows, saunters over the potato rows, “We’ve gotta celebrate man, I just made the Olympic snowboard team. I really don’t think those Japanese girls have any idea what they’re in for.”

Twenty minutes later Chuck, Rory and a red’n’rusty one-ton farm truck, two hooch bottles and quarter tank of fuel, floor it as they fishtail furiously around the front gate; dust, hollers and Nagano mon amour redlit in the taillights.

“Do you think we’re ever gonna come back to this Mosquito messed potato possessed valley after we make it large?” Rory bellows at Chuck over the hammering engine...

Chuck can’t help thinking to himself: “Look, you’ve got it made. On the first team of Canadians to compete for Olympic medals on a snowboard. When you get home they’re gonna give you a sunny lot on Green Lake,

a permanent lift pass and a free parking spot under the gondola barn. Shucks, they'll rename that picnic area by Fitz Creek McDougall Park if you getta gold." Hands battle back to the steering wheel as no one else's in control. "I've gotta lot to look forward too... dirt, diesel tractors and pretending I'm stoked our winter squash was certified organic." Chuck looks down through the hole in the floorboards to the wildly rushing weeds and blackish-purple tar below. It's all a blur.

"I'm really stoked about this Olympic thing, I don't got much else right now man," Rory leans over and yells into Chuck's ear. "You've got the farm... you're set. I'm older than most of the guys rollin' the snowboard scene right now. I really think the Olympics will take me over the top. Freeride team all the way after I get back from the Games..."

"Pal, I'm with you. But don't count on me farmin'... I've got a gold medal exit strategy that's gonna look after me and you both," Chuck smirks and pins the truck, rocks and straw spraying the old, red church on the corner.



ILLUSTRATION BY CHRISTINA NICK

"Some hippies think they're turnin' that old ratbox church into a house! Rats don't move out, ever. Christ!" Smoke. Diesel. Dust. Disappear.

An hour later, Chuck and Rory are backcountry, deep into the Hurley River Road to Bralorne. Railroad Pass. Sultry succulent, the sweet scent of Donnelly Creek strokes the lads on the cheeks as they lean over, form fishlips and drink... deep and hard. "Okay, you have the map. I'm not gonna make one. We'll rip this one in two and each keep half, that way we're partners forever. This is bigger than your wildest dreams man, we could make millions... play our cards right. We need to keep this buried, dirty package between us. You give the map to anyone else, I'm out and we both die. Understand?" Chuck rips and passes. One map. Two men. Solitary, silent secret.

"In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, 'til thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." Genesis 3:19

The Pastor purses his pout and steps back: "This is one of Chuck's favourite songs, he told most of his close friends it was the song to be played at his memorial." The choir slowly segues into Guns 'n Roses "Sweet Child of Mine." Just inside the door of the church at Chuck "Mess-up" Jessup's memorial, The Girls hover. Not connected enough to sit inside, not disconnected enough to go to the bar around the corner. Jenna St. James runs into the foyer looking mostly manic and clearly disheveled...Jean Jones clutches at Patti's sequined arm and whispers. "If she's here..."

"By the way, where's Minty!" Jenna screams at the assembly.

R

CHAPTER 4  
BY SEAN WILKEN

Rory was having another bad day.

He was cold, wet and bored.

He was cold and wet because Rory was standing in the snow, in some of the worst rain in his life, had been standing there for two hours and forty seven minutes (by his last count) and the rain, which he noted sourly had developed into sleet and freezing water, had worked its way through every zip, opening and gap in what he had been assured only that morning was a super-comfy and warm uniform.

The boredom was more complicated.

You'd think Chuck's death should have made life anything but boring. You'd think...

Rory was different.

For a start, all this at his client's insistence – as passed on by his supervisor – he had to be there, she was going to arrive at any minute, her board needed carrying and he just looked “so cute in the snow”.

Then there was the small fact that Rory was a former Olympian. Olympians do not instruct and they certainly are not forced to stand in the snow by a client backed up by some supervisor. A supervisor who had disappeared, gone skiing, informed Rory that there was awesome powder up top and was now drinking coffee with his buddies.

But all those causes of boredom were, Rory had decided, superficial. Rory, these days, did not mind waiting for clients. It was just that normally he would wait in a warm, bar with several large, comforting Jack D's. No, the real cause was that, contrary to current appearances, Rory was not interested in boarding and certainly was not interested in teaching.

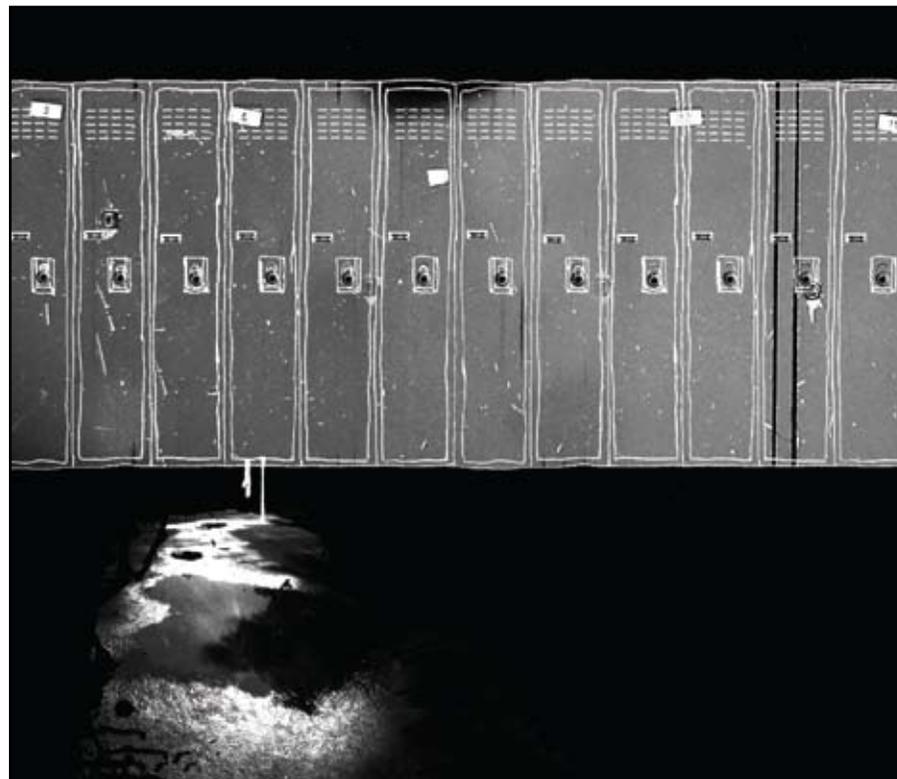


ILLUSTRATION BY JON PARRIS

After the “fall” (as Rory described the incident involving the UK women’s curling team and his subsequent exclusion from the Games) Rory had become a “Private Investigator”.

In Rory’s mind, this meant slouched fedoras, London fog coats, late night bars, smooth cocktails, impossibly attractive brunettes whispering their intimate details into his all-knowing, and let’s face it, over excited ears. All in black and white. With a very knowing voice-over. Probably De Niro as Rory in the movie.

In reality, it meant an escape from the endless boredom of driving back hoes and ploughs for the muni or tow trucks. All of it to make the rent. And where the only release was trashing some 4x4 in Marketplace or towing the sole vehicle from an otherwise totally empty garage on a minor, technical infraction.

In reality, it also meant divorces. In return for cold, hard cash up front, Rory documented the evidence that was already there, or, if the money was really good, ensured the evidence was provided.

His current client, Lawrence Rumswitz III, was a new direction in this career.

Rumswitz was, as he reminded Rory every time they spoke, Connected (you could, Rory swore, hear the capital C). After a successful career as a thrusting Senator – Florida (Republican) – he had negotiated his way into a series of lucrative military contracts before expanding into the “Four Season Leisure Real Estate” empire splashed all over the Globe and Mail as a major new force in BC finance and politics. Rumswitz was therefore powerful, influential, very “now”, very useful and very, very rich.

Rumswitz was also, in Rory’s considered opinion, a mad, paranoid, lecherous old coot.

Why?

The current (and fifth) Mrs Rumswitz III. MuMu to her friends.

MuMu was a blonde, 26 year old, former dental hygienist who, whilst scraping the plaque from Rumswitz’s expensive, 87 year old smile, had seen something she liked. Rumswitz had also seen several things he liked. The rest – as well as the fourth Mrs Rumswitz – was history.

MuMu liked boarding and was in town to board. And that was the problem. Rumswitz did not. It was “too damn cold”, he was “too damn old” and was off “negotiating a deal with some big shot local developer”. Rumswitz had heard, however, of what might happen between attractive, very wealthy women with older husbands and young boarding instructors over, as he understood it, martinis in the Mallard or beers at Merlins.

That, Rumswitz said, could happen at a moment’s notice, but was, quite definitely, not to happen.

Rumswitz therefore had a plan.

Rory would return to instructing. Rory would be, as Rumswitz put it, “a big draw for big money”. Rumswitz had money and it was big. Rumswitz would treat MuMu to some glamour lessons with the Olympian. In return, as well as being paid for the lessons, Rory would be paid to “run interference” - interposing himself by whatever means possible between MuMu’s many charms and any candidate instructor on the basis (so MuMu would think) that Rory wanted MuMu for himself.

Hence, Rory thought, mad, paranoid, lecherous etc etc.

This was day 1 of the job. Rory had arrived, picked up a uniform and been given a locker.

“Well, heeeeeellllloooooo, gorgeous. You must be my instructor”

Before him was a woman, dressed in white – white Prada, white fur, white fur boots, white fur gloves, white fur hat. All of it very new and some of it at least 1 size too small. The Prada was unzipped in a way more suited to a cocktail bar than the slopes.

MuMu, Rory concluded. Rory's supervisor confirmed this by emerging from the daylodge with his buddies pointing at Rory and grinning evilly.

Waving a cellphone in Rory's direction, MuMu continued: "I was waiting for a friend of mine – Janna, Janna St James – we all could have had a little party.... But she has disappeared on me. As it is and this weather, weeeellll" MuMu stopped and gave Rory an appraising stare "I think we should have a little drink in the bar. And, as my instructor, you have to teach me something, don't you? So get changed and meet me there in 5. I'll be waiting."

At this MuMu headed off. Rory shrugged and headed to his locker to dump his gear and change.

It was dark downstairs and finding the locker was difficult. As was working the lock.

Eventually, the locker opened. An over-ripe, sweet smell filled the room.

Minty St. James' body, shot in the head and heart, right hand clutching a bloodstained, familiar-looking, piece of paper, left hand a potato, crashed onto the floor of the locker room.

Rory screamed.



CHAPTER FIVE  
BY STELLA L. HARVEY

His shoulder blades pinched as the officer slammed his weight into Rory and made him stumble forward. The other officer yanked on Rory's arm. "Steady," He said. "Thought you'd lay off that stuff, graduate to booze after you nearly killed one of those Limey rock throwing girls." The officer behind Rory cinched the nylon hand cuffs.

The cuffs bit at his wrists. "Do we need to do this?" Rory asked. "I called you guys. Remember?" He couldn't feel his hands. He pushed his head back to get the hair out of his eyes. He flexed his shoulders but found no relief.

"You're a person of interest. It's procedure." The cop who'd steadied him stood in front of Rory and grinned as if to say, "and there's nothing you can do about it." Two teeth in the officer's mouth were capped in gold. The embossed name tag pinned at his chest shimmered in the locker room's muted overhead lights. Constable Baker. His eyes were the same unrevealing grey. He'd packed on some weight since Rory last saw him.

Baker's golden hair had diminished. An uneven, mottled scalp remained and he was still the dickhead former captain of the Olympic snowboard team, the guy who'd turned his back on Rory after that thing with the women's curling team. The smell of a spicy curry lingered on Baker's uniform and on his breath. Rory had associated that smell with Baker since they were kids. Rory turned his head. Baker reached behind Rory and gave the handcuffs another tug. "Nothing personal," he said, and bathed Rory's face in a curry burp.

"I can't feel my hands."

"You will."

Baker grinned and nodded at his partner. "When we get back to the station."

In the cruiser, Rory sat on the shredded vinyl seat in the back. The stiff slivers pierced the cheap instructor's uniform he'd been issued and nipped at his butt. He fidgeted but couldn't get comfortable. He squeezed his hands. Still he couldn't feel them.

"Where's my client?" Rory asked.

"You always had a way with the girls, didn't you?"

"Where is she?"

"You'll have your reunion soon," Baker said. "First, we're going for a ride."

The cruiser dragged by the fields on either side of the Pemberton road. Rory had been out here a hundred times but on this overcast night he saw nothing he recognized. Baker and his partner talked, laughed between themselves about the detachment's hockey pool but said nothing to Rory. An ache had settled between his shoulder blades. He wondered if these two were involved somehow in Chuck's plans. Chuck or Minty had talked, said something to someone. They'd bragged and flaunted how they lived off of other people's supply. Someone had had enough. Did they know Rory had a map to the place? Had they put Minty in his locker to warn him? Get rid of all three of them?

"You two were pretty close," Baker said. "Know what he was doing out here?"

"Farming," Rory said. He thought about his half of the map. He'd buried it one night under the second boulder to the left of the Rainbow trailhead,

told no one.

"He was living high," Baker said. "Everyone knew it. You knew it."

"Look I'm an instructor, a Private Investigator," Rory said. "I'm on your side. I don't know about any shit. Okay?"

They drove through the open gates of Chuck's property. "Tell us something."

They stood him out in cold for awhile, while they sat in the cruiser ignoring him. They drove away and then returned fifteen minutes later. "Fresh air help your memory?"

Rory shivered, said nothing. Baker and his partner stood with the cruiser door open. "You can get back in if you tell us something."

On the radio, Ellie Araceli's voice came through. "Where are you guys?"

"Um, heading back now Captain."

"The place is swarming with media. Get him back here now."

They pushed Rory into the cruiser and sat him up when he toppled over, patted down his instructor's uniform. Baker spit on his fingers and wet Rory's hair into place. Snot tinted Rory's upper lip and Baker made him blow into a Kleenex, and then threw the tissue on the ground. "Let's make nice now. No blabbing. Right?"

Rory gave one quick nod. Baker smiled and curry perfumed the air. Ellie had rescued him from Baker. He hadn't heard her voice since his Olympic fiasco. "What do you need," she'd asked him then. "I can help," she'd offered and he'd said, "I got myself in and I'll get myself out." Things may have been different if he'd allowed her to help. Now, here she was again. Maybe this time he'd take her up on it.

They'd known each other since they were twelve, lost their respective virginity to one another when they were seventeen and he'd dumped her when he made the Olympic team because he wanted "other experiences". He remembered now the first time they met. "Araceli means altar of the

sky in Spanish, you know.” When they first had sex, she reminded him that like her name she’d need an altar in the sky when they got married. Her head lay on his chest, her hair pricked his skin. He’d detested the scent of lavender, her scent, since that day. He’d continued to sleep with her anyway, until he broke it off.

When the cruiser pulled up at the Whistler RCMP detachment, the news had already spread and a crowd waited at the entrance. When Rory stepped out of the cruiser, he heard someone say, “What’s No-Go Rory done now?” Cameras flashed, someone shouted, “Give us a smile. Over here.”

The voices dissipated when Rory entered the detachment. Inside, MuMu Rumswitz sat on a chair against the wall, flicking, then patting down the white fur on her gloves. When she saw him, MuMu said. “They can’t do this to me. Tell them who I’m married to.”

Rory nodded. Someone released his handcuffs and Rory stretched out his arms, rubbed at the welts carved into his wrists. The station officer took the laces from Rory’s snowboard boots, his wallet and the five nickels and two loonies he had in his pocket and led him out of the open area. Rory heard, MuMu say, “Don’t forget.”

“Isn’t that cute,” Baker said. “Now she’s worried about her husband.” Rory sat in a windowless room at a rectangular table staring at the locked door in front of him. He slipped out of his snowboard boots and rubbed one foot with the other. The scent of stale sweat battered him and he put his boots back on, fanned the air around his feet when he heard the key in the lock.

He stood up but she waved to him to stay put. “You haven’t changed a bit, Ellie.”

“Except I’m the boss, now.”

“I didn’t kill her. Anyone.”

“We know about Chuck and Minty. Were you three in some kind of triangle?”

“You think I was sleeping with her, and killed them both in a jealous rage?”

“Well?”

“You know I don’t get that passionate about anything.”

“Doesn’t matter now. It’s out of my hands. They’re bringing in some senior detective from Vancouver’s homicide squad. He’s up here anyway, playing at semi retirement. Weasel working at the World Cup. He’ll be here as soon as he’s off the hill. Apparently he’s not too happy about that either. You can tell him your story.”

“I didn’t do it.”

Ellie opened the door. In the background, Rory heard Janna St. James.

“Where’s the bastard who killed my granny?”

“He’s a person of interest,” someone else said.

“Are you involved too, MuMu?” Janna said. “I thought we were friends.”

“Ellie, please,” Rory said. The door scraped against the floor and the click of the key meant he wasn’t going anywhere.



ILLUSTRATION BY DAVE PETKO



CHAPTER SIX  
BY KIM THOMPSON

Every so often a bloated snowflake catches an airstream to be tossed aimlessly in an acrobatic moment of glory before joining Whistler's slushy streets. A few snowflakes end their journey on the tongue of a snotty nosed kid or an eyelash of a beautiful woman like Janna St. James. Those are the lucky ones.

Janna St. James wiped back the tears that mixed with the snow and snot running down her face. The snowfall was unleashed, sending its energy through Whistler Village. You could see the twinkle of excitement in the eyes of every camera happy tourist on the Village Stroll but it all made Janna want to puke.

She swallowed back the bile in her mouth. Her grandmother Minerva "Minty" St. James was dead. Gammy Minty didn't pass away on her own terms - her last moments were ones of terror. Janna lurched at the thought and finally allowed the vomit to splatter the pavement outside of Tommy

Africa's nightclub. To the passerby Janna looked like just another binge drinking college kid.

Only one name surfaced once Janna regained her balance - Rory McDougall. At one time Janna had a schoolgirl crush on him that bloomed when she turned sixteen. She could still taste his lips - a mixture of beer and cigarettes. But that didn't matter now.

Janna was one of the few who didn't take cheap shots at "The No-Go at Nagano." But now every offside remark and bad joke came flooding back to her. And the tears came before she could stop them, boiling hot then instantly freezing on her face, and what was the point in wiping them off or pretending? She let them fall, her lips pressed hard together, walking blindly forward and running headlong into Hiroshi Steinberger.

"Janna?"

Hiroshi's blood shot eyes betrayed his night's activities, sadly staring into a foaming beer at Tapley's while willing the mess away. But that never works and Hiroshi's reality came screaming back with the last drop of beer in his glass. The thought that Rory had anything to do with the murders made him sick. It didn't make sense.

"Sorry," she said wiping her face.

"I don't know if you heard but my Gammy was found dead."

The verbal acknowledgement of Minty's death was too much and Janna crumpled into a pile of sobs, leaving Hiroshi to awkwardly pat her on the back. She reminded him so much of his own daughter with the intensity of those green eyes. Rough tears began to well up in his own eyes until he picked Janna up off the pavement and practically dragged her into Tapley's nearby.

While Janna nervously ripped apart a napkin, Tapley's was just warming up. Raucous cheers rose from the pockets of hockey fans around the bar. The Canucks were on the ice and taking the piss out of the Calgary Flames.



ILLUSTRATION BY JASMINE ROBINSON

Hiroshi watched Janna from the corner of his eye, unsure of where to tread.

He'd been the one scouring the Sea to Sky Corridor looking for any sign of Minty but sometimes even a helicopter can't save the day.

Hiroshi couldn't help but stare. Janna had grown into quite a woman since the last time he saw her at one of Minty's famous Rainbow Park barbecues. It was a hot day and his daughter and Janna hit it off. They spent most of the time in the lake only to suffer a nasty case of duck itch.

"How are you doing? Is there anything you need?" Hiroshi watched her reaction, silently cursing himself for being such a dumb ass. Is there anything you need? Could he come up with a dumber question?

"I want the bastard who killed my Gammy to rot in hell. No-Go doesn't deserve the cell he's sitting in."

"Janna, it's too early to jump to conclusions. Rory is a good man despite his obvious well...shortcomings. You don't understand the real story."

"Unbelievable...you're taking the side of a screw up like No Go?"

Janna was banging her fists into the table and the hockey fans stopped cheering to stare at the couple. Hiroshi didn't want to cause a scene so he spilled his story in rapid succession – hoping Janna would be too stunned to respond.

"I am the one who found Chuck at Joffre, but you already know that. I mean I was shaken up. I've seen some stuff in my day but this...it was gruesome."

"It was a murder, Janna," he said looking past her tears and into her eyes. "But I think something bigger is happening here. I was told to take Chuck's body down right away. Don't you see? They were treating it like a backcountry accident, not a crime scene. They needed someone to pin it on and Rory was the closest scapegoat."

Hiroshi stared at his beer, watching the foam twist into the drink. He gave Janna time to stop sobbing.

"Take me there. Take me to Joffre. I want to see it myself," Janna said glaring at Hiroshi settling her frustration on his face.

She looked at Hiroshi the way his daughter used to when they were on speaking terms. It was hard to say no then and it was harder now. She reminded him so much of his daughter. His heart staggered a bit, he missed her so much.

"Okay Janna. We'll go in the morning but I don't think we'll find anything."

*I*n the wee hours of the morning giddy skiers and snowboarders lined up at the gondola. Sleep came in fits and starts for the blurry-eyed crowd as

snowflakes reflected off headlights covering up the slushy Whistler streets. Life had taken on a single-minded purpose for those in the lineup. It was not rational or understandable to the outsider. A 30-centimetre blanket of snow fell through the night – creating powder fever.

Janna's fever had little to do with powder but her life now had a single purpose. She looked at the snow clinging to the trees and it made her feel hopeful. Gammy always said that every snowfall wiped the slate clean.

Still she hoped it wasn't too clean and that Joffre would point to something. Janna couldn't hear anything above the thwack of the helicopter. The tears came again but this time Janna wiped them away as the site of Chuck's murder came into view.



CHAPTER 7  
BY ANNABELL MAILATH

*A* clean slate indeed. As the helicopter lowered, Janna and Hiroshi stared down with wide eyes at the pure white ground, full of disappointment. Not an obvious clue to be seen in any direction. Janna's heart sank at the thought that solving her Gammy's murder would remain dependent on the only suspect in custody.

Despite the fact that Mother Nature had tried to cover up and start anew, Janna remained relentless, determined to find something to prove once and for all that Rory was a no good, conniving killer. Anything – a footprint; lone potato; a lost mitten – that might give an indication that Rory had dumped Chuck on the mountain after brutally killing him. The two of them walked what seems like endless circles around the large area for hours. Hiroshi secretly hoped Janna would just get tired and give up; all he could picture was Chuck's pale body lying in a pool of frozen blood on the glistening snow. Only the purple potatoes maintained their natural colors. The image made his stomach turn.

As the hours slipped by Janna became desperate at the thought that there really wasn't anything to find that might help them determine who had been there that fateful day. The tears built up in her eyes again and she did everything she could to try and stop them, but it was no use. She put her snow and tear soaked gloves to her face and let herself sob as she had already done so many times that day. Time seemed to slow down and let her have her moment. Her chest felt heavy and she removed her hands to take a deep breath. She let her body lean to the left, against the nearest tree, for support. As if Mother Nature took some pity on the poor girl, and before Janna had a chance to inhale, something floated down gently in front of her and onto the crisp snow. A single little turquoise feather. Her hands now rested on her chest as she placed the little feather in her mind.

Janna's brain started racing. It flashed back to the past summer - Sunday afternoon strolling down by the Chateau, stopping at every little tent in the farmers market to smell the fresh fruit and take a closer look at the intricate necklaces and hats. She had always admired the craftsmanship of the woven clothing and enjoyed the warm smell of the sweet popcorn wafting through the air. At that moment her memory focused in on one particular time when she was with Mumu. They had come across a stand that was draped with brightly covered scarves. The elderly artisan was very proud of her handiwork and explained how she had made them from colored quail feathers. Janna was weirded out by the thought of having bird feather touching her face, but Mumu, accustomed to wearing dead animals as hats, jumped at the chance to have one of these decorative accessories.

Janna shut her eyes tight. Impossible! Mumu had been one of her childhood friends. Why would she want Minty dead? Further more, the skinny little blond thing would not have the guts, or the strength, to go through with it. Sickness rose in Janna's body again. She turned away from the tree and vomited whatever was still left in her. Wiping her mouth on her sleeve she denied herself any more images of Mumu contorting her Gammy's lifeless limbs into the locker. It came to her that there was still one other person she knew that had a similar scarf.

*A*s if from the dead, Rory swore he could hear Chuck's voice in the front office of the Police Station. Any minute he would be standing in front of the

jail cell with Constable Baker unlocking the door, slapping Baker on the arm, his eyes glowing with pride. A look of disappointment would be on Baker's face as he watched Rory scramble out the door and embrace Chuck while remarking, with a grin on his face, what a stupid joke it all was. "Way to go Chuck, you had us all fooled. You're going to get it, you know." And then he awoke. Uncomfortable on the dirty cot he turned to face the other wall, his eyes open but not staring at anything in particular, wondering how he managed to get himself in this place again. He let his mind wander back to when he was sitting in that beat-up truck with Chuck. The day they split the map and Chuck had made his promise of prosperity and freedom. Chuck had made that pact with him, how could he have shared it with Minty? Rory hardly knew anything about 'the plan'; why was Chuck suddenly so trusting? What could Minty offer that he couldn't? He was not obligated to feel guilty for this crime; it angered him that he was not allowed to defend himself properly. He sat up abruptly and was about to yell through the bars when he heard something else, another familiar voice.



ILLUSTRATION BY JUSTIN ORMISTON

Patti Peterson and Mr. Rumswitz walked into the Police Station together, she in her turquoise jacket and he in his expensive pin stripe suit. Everyone turned to watch as they strolled up to the front desk, but thought of it as nothing but a coincidence. At the sight of her husband Mumu hung her head down and mustered as many tears as she could to convince him she was his innocent wife caught up in a horrible mistake. Without a word he hurried through the paper work, grabbed her arm and they were out the door as quickly as he had come in. Patti on the other hand sat down emphatically at Constable Baker's with her purse gripped tightly with both hands. Her presence made the whole precinct hum with curiosity. She stared directly into Bakers eyes, "Do you honestly think that a man known around this community as a no go athlete would want another reason to be looked down upon? Hasn't he been ostracized enough Brian Baker? You should be ashamed! What would your mother think?"

It was not Chuck that walked up to the cell with Baker, but rather Patti. Rory sat on the cot with a half open mouth before standing up to leave the now unlocked cell. She had been his mother's friend for years, but he never expected Patti to be the one to bail him out. They walked in silence to the desk so he could pick up his things and continued so to her Cadillac in the parking lot.



## CHAPTER 8

BY REBECCA WOOD BARRETT

Rory rolled down the passenger window of Patti Peterson's Cadillac and a blast of ice crystals pelted his face. He needed clarity. All he got was stinging pain.

Patti ripped off one of her feathery turquoise gloves and grabbed his thigh. "I know you're innocent, Rory."

He squirmed under the pressure of her French manicure. "Um, good."

"We have to figure out which little Whistler weasel is out to frame you. Did you know that Minty and Messup—sorry—Chuck, were having an affair?"

Rory coughed. Mumbled an affirmation.

"I know what you think. Minty was just some ole cougar, cattin' around, getting her meow on. Not Minty St. James. She had a plan. And it was all

about money. You got any idea what she and Chuck were up to?"

"Er, a development deal?"

Patti removed her claw from Rory's thigh and suddenly reeled on the steering wheel, causing the Caddy to fishtail into the driveway of his condo. She e-braked to a sliding stop. "Listen up, Sherlock. You want to beat the rap, you have to get a clue, find out who's pulled the sucker punch. What kind of a P.I. are you, anyways? Be at my house, tonight at seven, everyone will be there. Do you own a razor?"

Rory nodded. What kind of sick revenge did this woman have in mind?

"Then use it. Last thing this town needs is a bunch of bogus Sasquatch sightings."

Of course, she was right. Unless Rory got his shiznitz together he'd be making long-time pals with a set of steel bars and a cell-mate nicknamed Big Daddy. Rory showered, shaved and splashed with a dash of Brut. He raced around his entire studio suite (it didn't take long), bundled six half-quaffed bottles of Grand Royal in his arms and then poured them down the sink. Bye-bye fuzzbrain. "No-Go" McDougall was officially dead. Rory P.I. was alive, alive and kicking.

Rory stood in the vestibule of Patti's monster-home, while her Aussie manservant removed Rory's ski jacket and hung it up in a mud-room the size of Rory's studio suite. The open-plan mansion was stuffed to the gills with Whistler's ruling elite—Councilors, the mayor, municipal staff, SLRD reps, two MLAs, developers and real estate agents—in celebration of the new P3 Sewerage System. In a spectacular feat of boondoggelery, Peterson Putridity Purveyors Ltd.—the new private owner of the municipal water treatment centre—had squashed Whistler Water Watch like a turd under its politically-tied boot.

Rory sidled around the edge of the room, scanning for prime suspects, while keeping the furthest possible distance from Janna St. James, on the opposite side. The blonde teen was swirling her unsanctioned merlot like an after-hours hot tub, as she critically surveyed the who's who of

backroom deals and slippery handshakes. Her eyes caught Rory's. She mouthed something. It looked like "sorry." Or was it "gory"? He nodded and quickly glanced away.

Lawrence Rumswitz, Rory's only client, and wannabe big-shot developer, was bellying up to the sewage-themed buffet bar, fishing a sausage out of a flowing river of gravy. You had to give it to Patti, she sure could throw a party; every inch of the place was decked out in shades of brown.

"Mr. Rumswitz," said Rory. "Ah, I want to apologize for what happened. I'm sorry MuMu had to go through all that."

"My sweet MuMu," he said with a sigh, "it's not the first time she's been hauled into the precinct, thrown in the tank. Too many Jager-bombs make her, well, feisty."

"I meant, uh, having to see Mrs. St. James...in my locker. You know, with the bullet wounds and being dead and everything."

"Right. Yes. Tragic scene. But don't worry, our lovely host Patti told me you're golden."

"Oh. Okay, good stuff. So, what's keeping you busy in Whistler these days?"

Rumswitz picked a bit of sausage out of the gap between his front teeth.

"Mmm, big developments, got a couple massive projects in the works. We're desperate for crew. Labourers. Framers. Sub-trades. All cash in hand. Know any?"

"I'll ask around," said Rory.

"You do that," said Rumswitz. "MuMu tells me she still wants snowboard lessons."

"I'm glad."

"From an Olympian." Rumswitz winked.



ILLUSTRATION BY CORINNA HAIGHT

Rory wanted to tell him to get stuffed with a purple Pemberton potato. He was a P.I. now. No-Go was history.

“Um, sure, okay. Call me,” Rory acquiesced, and slipped off through the crowd. He told himself he needed the money, and besides, technically speaking Rumswitz had hired him as a P.I. to keep an eye on MuMu, not as a snowboard instructor. But what the hell, something stank, and it wasn’t just the theme gravy, growing sluggish from the burning hotplates. Was it possible Rumswitz knew about Chuck’s secret stash, hidden way out the back-forty, up the Hurley River Road? Last fall it had taken Chuck all day to find the location again, and that was with the map. Several weeks prior, while out mushroom hunting, Chuck had stumbled across acres and acres of prime BC bud. He’d showed Rory the plot, and they’d split the map. But Rory had his doubts. How would they harvest it? Sell it? What would they do with all the cash? He didn’t know squat about money laundering.

Across the room, Rumswitz speared what looked like a meatball out of the gravy river. And then Rory knew: Rumswitz needed an army of workers for his developments...paid in cash. Chuck and Minty must have looked for a developer to run the money. Then again, maybe it wasn’t Rumswitz... Ralph Peterson was just as likely. The town was crawling with sleazebag developers. You couldn’t piss on your left foot without hitting one. If only he could connect Chuck and Minty to...who?

Rory felt a soft pressure on his shoulder. He turned. Janna St. James’s face had become even more beautiful in her grief. She had stopped poofing her hair into the style of a helmet and given up on the pound of foundation. She was au naturel. Janna stared into Rory’s eyes as she pressed something soft into his hands. It had tiny hairs that tickled his palm. A bit of cloth, perhaps, or a feather.

“Don’t look,” she whispered.  
“I won’t,” said Rory.



CHAPTER 9  
BY KATHERINE FAWCETT

The truth was, Rory couldn't focus anywhere but on Janna's derriere as it sashayed past the stone fireplace away from him. Oh, she was a package of Christmas morning. Her hips rocked hypnotically from side to side and Rory didn't notice the trickle of saliva that meandered down the side of his face. He also didn't notice the old man hitting him on the side of the head with a newspaper.

"Hey shithead." Whack. "Numbnuts." Thwack.

"Oh! Ah, sorry Mr. Rumswitz," said Rory, shaking himself out of his reverie and wiping his chin. His sweaty hand still gripped whatever it was Janna had slipped him. "What's up?"

"Have you seen this?" Bits of meatball clung to his wormy lips. "This is what I've been trying to avoid, you little schmuck."

The Pique was folded back to the Partial Recall section, which featured a shot of Mumu spilling out of her tank top, bleary-eyed and shiny-haired, petting the bicep of a bartender at the GLC.

"Gee Mr. Rumswitz, She looks really... I mean, I'm so sorry, I guess I should have been..." Rory stammered. But no. That was the old Rory. "Actually, sir, I'm not a marriage counsellor. I'm not a babysitter. I'm a professional snowboarder and," he lowered his voice and tipped his eyebrows downward "your private investigator. Nothing more. I can't change what she does. I can't take the sugar out of a tart. I can't make her love you. I can only report on what she does. Besides. Look at the date. This is from weeks ago."

Rory took a closer look. Mumu's hair consumed most of the frame, but something in the background caught his eye. It looked an awful lot like Chuck. That was definitely Chuck! Who was he with? Wasn't that Barb McCann? Minty's housecleaner? What were they doing together? Was he whispering something in her ear? or kissing her neck?

Rumswitz grabbed the newspaper and stormed away in a lumbering huff. Rory looked around for Janna. She was gone. He had to talk to her about Barb; she was connected to both Minty and Chuck. Everyone knew she was broke after her lawsuit with VANOC over the "Olympic Cleaning Services" name. And wasn't her company famous for their cash-in-hand, "Get High, Tidy up and Snoop" policy?

Looking down, Rory suddenly remembered. He slowly opened his hand. Lifting up the bright pink fabric, he gave it a shake before he could tell what it was. What the --? Rory grabbed his coat and ran out the front door towards Minty's house, where he knew she'd be waiting. He couldn't believe that Janna St. James had pressed her panties into his hand.

"Janna!" He banged on the door. "It's me! Open up!" The door swung open and she flew into his arms, kissing him hard. "Janna. Wait. I want this too, but I need to tell you--" mmpfh mmpfh. She was kissing him again. "It's about the mur--" Tongue this time.

He held her shoulders away from him. Opened his mouth to speak. But something about Janna's smeared lipstick, her big Japanimation eyes and the way she was unbuttoning her shirt made him forget what he was going to say.



ILLUSTRATION BY MEGHAN REID

Rory yanked his fleece and t-shirt over his head. Static made his hair stand straight up. She grabbed him by the belt loops, and pressed her chest against him. Static could not be blamed for the other body parts in the room that were also defying gravity. Murder schmurder. He held her face in his hands and kissed her like he was in a pie eating contest and she was lemon meringue. “Spare room,” she growled and started down the hall. “Follow me.” He tripped taking his boots off. Hopping. Kicking. Lost a sock. She threw her shirt over a plant. He whipped his belt off and chucked it into down the hall. A cat meowed from somewhere. A bra landed on the ceiling fan. She fell backwards onto the bed. He tumbled after her; she held him by the hair. Their lips mashed together. Exploring. Remembering. Tasting. He reached behind her waist to undo her skirt, but got confused. It had been awhile since he’d undressed a real woman. And this was a wraparound job. With a button on the inside. Somewhere. “Let me,” she said after she could no longer bear his fumbling.

Rory remembered that it had been a very long time since his last shower. He casually tipped his head down and to the left and inhaled discreetly to check himself. Not bad. But there was a funny odour. “Is this your room?” he said. “No, mine’s upstairs. Barb’s been staying here,” Rory stopped. “Barb, the house-cleaner?” “Yeah. But don’t worry, she’s gone for a while. Who cares?” She finally dropped her skirt onto the floor and flipped over, naked as a pre-paint Cornucopia model, pinning him down by the wrists and kissing his collarbone.

“Wait,” said Rory, sitting up. “Where did she go? How do you know?” “God. What’s your problem?” Janna sat up on the side of the bed. “You’re really concerned with that old bag, eh?” She folded her arms over her chest and crossed her legs. “She and Hiroshi went somewhere together. I saw the map. It was taped together but I could tell it was way past Pemberton.” She looked around, frowning, sniffed twice. “Ew. Is that you?” “This is too confusing. Janna, what do you know about Barb and Chuck? I think they had something going on.” “Mess-up? Never. Chuck was seeing Minty. Gammy would never have tolerated sharing him. It was OK for HER to date others, but she held her firm in her double standards.”

Janna reached down to pick up her skirt. The passion had fizzled so fast you could practically hear tissues shrivelling. Regret and embarrassment washed over her like an avalanche. But what was that stink? Maybe the cat peed on the carpet. She bent down onto the floor to check. Something under the bed made her catch her breath.

“Rory.” Her voice quivered. “Come look at this.” He bent down beside her. On the floor was a cat toy, a little purple feathered stuffie filled with cat-nip.

“Cool” said Rory. “But right now I think we should concentrate on—“ “No, look back there.” In the shadows under the bed lay a pile of rotting purple potatoes and a black book with gold lettering on the cover: Pilot’s Log Book.



CHAPTER 10  
BY LISA RICHARDSON

Rory slid under the bed, flicking open the stained black book to the last entry. “Jee-sus.”

The pilot had recorded flying two heliskiing clients, Darren Baker and Minerva St. James, and a 220lb “food-drop” package up to Joffre, dropping them off to “cache the supplies” with orders to return in two hours for a client pick-up at a lower elevation.

Rory wormed his head and shoulders deeper under the bed frame, to wrestle forth the pile of potatoes, and see what other dark treasures were stashed under the house-cleaner’s temporary nest.

The angry strains of Beethoven’s 9th suddenly reverberated through the house, followed by an aggressive rapping at the door. Rory recoiled, smashing his head on the underside of the bedframe.

Janna jumped to her feet and shimmied into her clothes like a girl practiced to changing in co-ed locker rooms. She raced for the front door, leaving Rory mumbling something unintelligible behind her.

Ellie Veraceli unholstered her RCMP-issued sidearm. “One more time,” she nodded to her companion.

Carly Hughes rapped hard for the third time on Minty St. James’ front door, just as Janna swung it open, her prepared peaches-and-sweetness smile sliding from her face as she caught the glint of Ellie’s gun.

“What the ...??”

Behind her, Rory was holding the Pilot Log out like an offering, “Janna, it was your grandmother.”

Carly and Ellie moved into the foyer, closing the door firmly behind them.

“I’ll take that,” said Ellie, eyeing the black book. “And whatever else you found under the bed.”

Rory stepped back, putting the book behind his back. “Aren’t you supposed to be over video-taping the tree-cutting party at Lot 1/9 so you can log all the local insurgents and hippies into your Olympic watchlist files?”

Ellie’s eyes once-overed Rory’s state of undress. Scowled, “And aren’t you supposed to be doing anything apart from having sex with minors?”

“I’m 19,” pouted Janna, pushing her not insubstantial chest forward.

“Yeah, well, you always had a thing for age-inappropriate female athletes,” Ellie spat at her old flame.

Carly, sensing an enhanced level of stress in the air exacerbated by Ellie’s still unholstered gun and the funk of Rory’s three day stale sweat, stepped between the two women. “Folks, let’s stay focused. Janna, we’re sorry to uhh, invade your privacy, but when we heard movement in the house, we thought maybe the suspects had beaten us to the evidence.”

Rory jumped two steps down into the sunken living room, brandishing a decorative fireplace poker before him. “Enough of this shit. I’ve already been arrested and released. It’s a set-up, Ellie. Come on.”

“They’ll have already left for the ribbon-cutting,” said Carly, looking at the clock on her cellphone. “We’ve got to get over there, and fast.”

Ellie flicked the safety back on her gun. “Rory, put the poker down. And get some pants on. We’ll explain in the car.”

“*A*re you going to put the siren on?” asked Janna, leaning her head between the front seats of the police cruiser. “We don’t want to lose the element of surprise,” muttered Ellie, gripping the steering wheel with bloodless knuckles.

Carly was bagging the Pilot Log and the potatoes into separate ziplock bags.

“How did Barb get hold of this stuff, anyway?” Rory squirmed in the backseat of a police cruiser for the second time in as many days. “She has the cleaning contract at RCMP staff housing. She called me when she discovered evidence pertaining to the Messup/St. James investigation in a garbage bag at the back of Constable Baker’s wardrobe.” Ellie slammed the flat of her hand against the wheel. “Right under my nose. My own guy.”

Carly angled around from the front passenger seat. “I’ve been debriefing Hiroshi since he found Chuck’s body. Then when Minty went missing...” She put her hand gently on Janna’s. “And the only people arrested were an alcoholic backhoe-driving has-been,

“Hey!”

“...and a 110 pound trophy wife, Hiroshi and I figured it was high time the rats that were stinking up this place were forced out for air.”

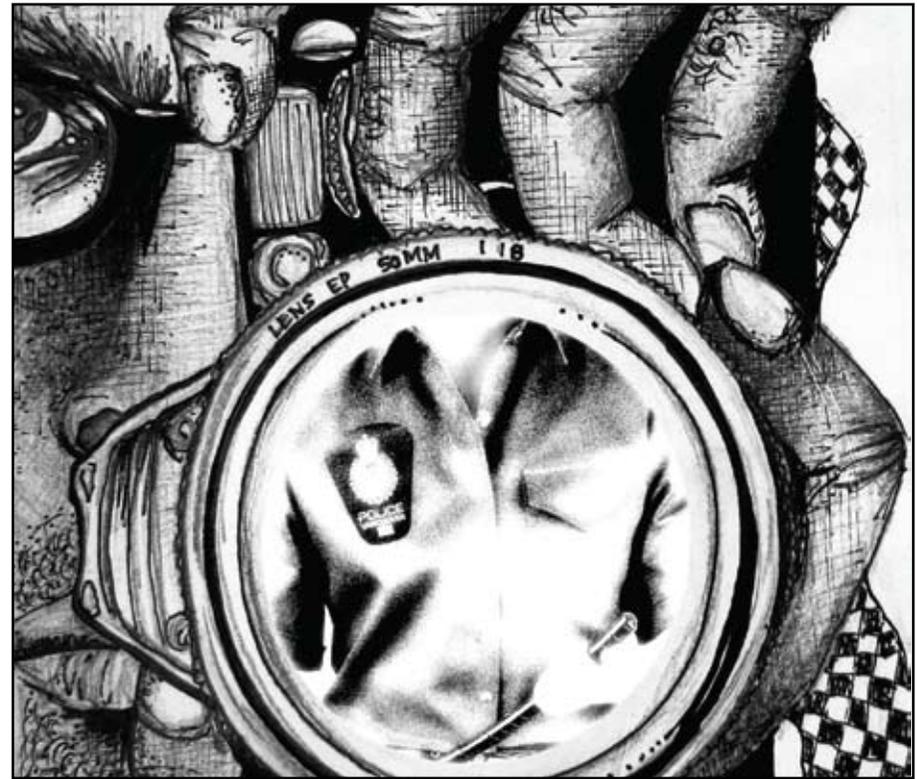


ILLUSTRATION BY REANNAN TYSON

Rory’s head was starting to ache – his crash course in sobriety, blue-balls, and efforts at moving the puzzle pieces into place, not to mention the way Ellie was navigating the gravel entrance to Lot 1/9, were taking their toll.

“*A* 300-person crowd, some in “Save The Trees” tees, was gathered behind bright yellow cordon, with RCMP video cameras trained on them. In counterpoint, 20 long lenses were zoned on the VIP deck, where most of Patti Peterson’s party had re-constituted to flash unnaturally whitened smiles, and watch benignly as the Mayor did the honorary ribbon-cutting for the future Olympic Medals Plaza with a chainsaw.

Ellie slammed the cruiser door shut, and strode officiously to the front of the dais where the microphone was primed.

“Ladies and Gentleman! Please!” The media swung their lenses, as one, to Ellie, thereby capturing her discrete nod into the crowd that signaled 25 navy-coated municipal by-law officers to move into formation, with 5 officers each positioned around the dignitaries Patti Peterson, Donald Rumswitz, Ralph Peterson, the Mayor, (from whom one officer was firmly retrieving the chainsaw), and at the back of the crowd, Constable Darren Baker.

“We’d like to take this opportunity to make an announcement. I have here warrants for the arrests of 5 suspects in the murder of or conspiracy to commit murder of Charles Jessup and Minerva St. James. The RCMP has worked hard, in conjunction with our colleagues at the Vancouver Homicide Investigation Division, to resolve this crime and ensure the safety of this community.”

Hiroshi Steinberger and Barb McCann stepped up to the microphone, as Carly turned to read the VIPs their rights.

Barb spoke, “Last week, in an in-camera meeting, the Mayor had Constable Darren Baker moved to the top of the employee housing list, ahead of 742 other people.”

There was a collective moan from the crowd.

“He did this at the request of several of the leading figures in this community, namely the late Minerva St James, Patti and Ralph Peterson, and Donald Rumswitz, all of whom have recently made sizable contributions to the mayor’s 2008 electoral campaign.”

20 long-lensed cameras stuttered a rapid-fire cross-examination of the Mayor’s blanching face, capturing the precise expression of discomfort as a by-law officer cinched a zap-strap tight around the Mayor’s wrists.

“They lobbied for this deal as payment for Constable Baker’s services to them.” Barb, who had cleaned the dirty laundry and picked up the crumbs from Whistler’s elite for two decades, was hitting her stride. “A service that enabled them to shut down the Pemberton Employee Warehouse

project, and ensure the next major employee housing would develop land co-owned by Rumswitz and the Petersons, next to the Peterson Putridity Purveyors Waste-Water Treatment Plant.”

Barb had made their beds after they’d slept with their children’s friends and their friends’ wives, and even been summonsed out by the jilted exes, like Chuck Jessup, to be plied for what inside information she might have, and there was a sweetness to this moment that she was savouring.

“This deal would give Minerva St. James the exclusive rights to sell the units in the development, netting her in excess of \$1.3 million in commissions. This development would also net Peterson Putridity Purveyors an indefinite contract to sell off-the-grid methane heat to the 350 units in the development, generating them an annual return of \$105,000 a year.”

Barb’s voice was starting to crack, like the knuckles on her chapped hands, dried out from so much exposure to industrial strength cleaning products.

Hiroshi stepped up, resolved, “The only person standing in their way was a man who had staked his entire fortune on employee housing moving up to Pemberton. A man who had been Minty’s business partner on the Pemberton Employee Warehouse, had been her lover, and her conspirator, burying a secret for her for more than 10 years. Chuck Jessup.”

Janna sobbed, “How can they say these things about my Gammy?”

Carly whispered, “Her powers of seduction were legendary. She used them on Chuck. And Constable Baker, when she needed Chuck dead. Even Ralph Peterson, years ago. She’s had Ralph over a barrel for 10 years, with incriminating photographs of them together that she’d had Chuck bury. And that’s how she kept Ralph loyal to using her services in all his real estate deals, making her the most successful realtor in the province.”

“So Ralph killed her? Janna snuffled.

“No. Constable Baker did. Jilted lover thing. She broke up with him after they dumped Chuck. He was bitter, and figured he could pin it on his old

snowboarding nemesis, Rory MacDougall.”

“And you’re telling me my grandmother did all this for some real estate commissions?” Janna asked.

“There’s only two things that make this place turn, Janna. Money. And powder. You’ve just got to know what side you’re on.”

Carly watched quietly as the Cheakamus Four Conspirators and killer Constable Baker were escorted away.

She put her arm around Janna’s shoulders. “Come on, I’ll buy you a latte.”



MURDER IN THE GREAT BIG PLAYGROUND  
A TALE OF REAL ESTATE, MURDER, POLITICS AND REALLY GREAT POWDER

A COLLECTIVE NOVEL

BIOGRAPHIES

WRITERS:

CINDY FILIPENKO

Cindy Filipenko is currently up to her eyeballs in animation scriptwriting. She dreams of one day penning an Oprah's Book Club selection.

GRANT STODDARD

Recent Whistler transplant, Grant Stoddard has spent the past five years working as a gonzo sex reporter at Nerve.com. Working Stiff – the Misadventures of An Accidental Sexpert is his new book. Having mastered the Kama Sutra at the tender age of 30, he's arrived in Whistler ready for his next challenge – learning to snowboard.

KEVIN DAMASKIE

Kevin Damaskie moved to Whistler in 1992 in pursuit of cold, deep powder and hot stories to foster his budding journalism career. About a millisecond after he arrived, he realized Whistler was the best community in the world and started building a life in this wonderful valley. He has worked as a reporter at the Whistler Question, helped design and launch Pique Newsmagazine and been published in Powder, Skier and Ski Canada magazines. He's currently working as the Sustainability Coordinator for the Resort Municipality of Whistler.

SEAN WILKEN

For more than ten years, London barrister Sean Wilken has returned from his annual Whistler ski trip to a mugging, robbery or identity theft, which he's starting to think is the universe telling him something. He's currently completing a manuscript for a children's chapter book and saving the world from terrorists.

STELLA L. HARVEY

Social worker, management consultant, and admitted obsessive compulsive-turned writer, Stella L. Harvey juggles organizing the Whistler Readers and Writers Festival, writing her second novel and valiantly striving to improve her skiing without causing injury to herself or others.

KIM THOMPSON

Kim Thompson is an up-town gal with downtown sensibilities. Her astrological sign is the double thumbs up and she is at home in the Spud Valley. Kim is a section editor for the Whistler Question, which is pretty awesome because that means she writes about the best place on earth – Whistler.

ANNABELL MAILATH

Annabell Mailath earned a BA in English before moving to Whistler from Ontario to work at the Fairmont Chateau Whistler. She writes in her spare time and dreams of becoming a travel writer.

#### REBECCA WOOD BARRETT

Writer and filmmaker Rebecca Wood Barrett enjoys genre-crossing, and has written feature and short screenplays, documentaries, commercials, short stories, non-fiction, picture books and a children's novel. She is a cat-person, but has been known to jump the fence for a few very special dogs.

#### KATHERINE FAWCETT

Katherine Fawcett came to Pemberton for dogsledding, and writes because it's easier than scooping poop. She has published a children's book, written a play, short stories and poetry, and contributed feature articles to magazines and newspapers throughout Canada. She wants to learn to play the mandolin and to make a decent omelette.

#### LISA RICHARDSON

Pemberton-based Lisa Richardson is a regular contributor to the Pique, as well as Mountain Life, Kootenay Mountain Culture, Whistler Magazine, and CBC Radio. In response to a writer-mutiny after two earlier incarnations of The Collective Novel Experiment which were written on-site, marathon-style, in gondolas and king-sized bedroom suites during the TELUS World Ski and Snowboard Festival, she was happy to corral local writers and artists into taking part in this third round, reaching newly civilized heights, thanks to Pique newmagazine.

#### ILLUSTRATORS:

##### PHRESHA LE VANDALÉ

Once upon a time, there was a silly girl who wasted all her time drawing. She drew night and day, from dusk till dawn on every surface that would dare challenge her. Armed with a bag full of paint, she roamed the alleys of the big city, hopping from roof to roof, hunting down abandoned walls and scavenging discarded treasures... [deviantethics.com](http://deviantethics.com)

#### KATIE GREEN

Born and Raised in Barrie, Ontario in a beautiful old red brick house, Katie Green was schooled at the University of Edinburgh and Mount Allison University in everything from Photography and English Literature to Basket Weaving. On moving to Whistler in 2006 to pursue her love of the Outdoors, Green started an inner tug-of-war between family, and beautiful surroundings, but is hopeful she can strike a balance.

#### CHRISTINA NICK

Christina Nick is a multi-disciplinary artist whose intense interest in nature, travel and the environment are reflected in her artwork. Since graduating from Mount Allison University in 1989 with a Bachelor of Fine Arts with distinction, Christina has been living her vision of bringing her experiences in nature to life through her art.

#### JON PARRIS

Artist Jon Parris works as a designer at Pique newsmagazine, where he is also the gatekeeper of the paper's cover-art, which has featured over 600 pieces of original art from local artists.

#### DAVE PETKO

Dave Petko is influenced by Rick Griffin, Victor Moscoso, Stanley Mouse, Derek Hess, Frank Kozik and a whole mess of other artists, both lowbrow and highbrow. Rock posters and stickers were his main influence when he began screenprinting stickers and serigraphs 15 years ago. Rarely does Dave work in pen and ink anymore as he discovered acrylics 13 years ago and is still having fun with that medium. He is currently tattooing at Black Ohm Tattoos in Whistler BC which he has called home since 1995. Dave's paintings and other works can be found at [davepetko.com](http://davepetko.com); [blindmuteproductions.com](http://blindmuteproductions.com); and [blackohmtattoogallery.com](http://blackohmtattoogallery.com).

#### JASMINE ROBINSON

A Whistler native. She has parlayed a Visual Arts degree from UVic and an Advanced Diploma in Graphic Design from the Art Institute of Vancouver, into an in-demand gig designing creative campaigns and collateral for the TELUS World Ski & Snowboard Festival, Old Spice Rail Tour, Avello Spa, and Prior Snowboards.

#### JUSTIN ORMISTON

Justin Ormiston is currently working out of Ormiston Inkworks Ltd, his private tattoo studio in Whistler, BC. Please allow his art work to do the talking. You can learn more about Mr. Ormiston's work at: [www.ormistonink.com](http://www.ormistonink.com)

#### CORINNA HAIGHT

Corinna is a self-taught, mixed media artist, from Collingwood Ontario who moved to BC in 2000. Her works have been shown in many local exhibits, including Artrageous, WinterPRIDE, and Artwalk. In February 2008 Corinna was commissioned to create as much art as she could for Luna's Castle Hostel in Panama City where she completed 35 paintings in 37 days. Her love for art knows no boundaries.

#### MEGHAN REID

Meghan Reid is a Graphic Designer and owner of Perfect Line Graphic Design, located in Whistler, BC. After graduating from Langara College's Publishing Arts program in 1999 Meghan has held a variety of Graphic Design positions in Calgary, Vancouver and Whistler. She has worked with a wide range of clients on Print and Web media projects. In her spare time she enjoys traveling, snowboarding and hiking.

#### REANNE TYSON

Reannan has a solid appreciation for snowboarding and the awesomeness of Whistler. With many creative threads in her family, her favorite is her accomplished fashion designer sister Brooke. Obsessed with plenty of aesthetically influenced environments, she majors in fashion as a makeup artist- and dabbles in media and textile design at university. She has aspirations of publishing a book, having many exhibitions and furthering herself in textile/fabric and wallpaper design. All the while, attempting total snowboard domination.