

DEATH IN DUPLICATE

CAROLE COPLEA



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Master Point Press

331 Douglas Ave.

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M5M 1H2 (416)781-0351

Email: info@masterpointpress.com

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IN MEMORIAM

I dedicate this, my first novel, to my sister Lois Maxwell (1927-2007),
the original actress who played Miss Moneypenny.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I wish to thank Camille, my daughter, for providing the inspiration for this novel right from the beginning. Her insightful comments and suggestions were instrumental in formulating the plot and characters.

There are a few trusted friends who helped: Lesley and Peter, for giving me my first audience; Nita and Ken, for their sincere comments and honesty; David and Katie, for their help and support; my bridge buddies in Oakville who believe in me; Wayne in Ottawa who helped with some details and the ending; and my brother, Victor.

I can't thank George Holland enough for his unwavering support. He donated countless hours to mentor me on the bridge content and provided detailed comments on every chapter. He graciously agreed to appear as a real character in the story.

Finally, and not the least, I wish to thank my publisher, Ray Lee, for having the courage to take on this project, and my brilliant editor, Suzanne Hocking, whose helpful comments in the final stages made my heart sing.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I wrote this novel to entertain my fellow bridge players, and also to reach a wider audience of people who are not currently involved in bridge but who may want to learn more about it.

All the characters are fictional, except for George Holland, who appears as himself.

People of all ages play bridge, either at home, in clubs or online. Bridge Base Online (BBO), attracts thousands of players across the planet every day. BBO also broadcasts tournaments where you can watch world class players in real time.

Bridge is an instant friend-maker — no matter where you go in the world, you can always find a bridge game or attend a bridge club and make new friends. If you want to enjoy bridge on your vacation, you can go on any number of cruises in exotic locations, sponsored by professional bridge players.

Bridge often becomes a life-long passion. There is no limit to improving your understanding of the game and your skill in playing it.

School students are discovering bridge. A growing number of teachers are promoting the game and setting up bridge clubs in their schools in recognition that bridge helps to develop communication and social skills as well as mental acuity.

To learn more about the fascinating world of bridge, contact your local bridge club, national association, or the World Bridge Federation.

And happy bridging!

Carole Coplea, 2013

Mary, Mary, quite contrary, how does your garden grow?
With silver bells and cockleshells, and pretty maids all in a row!

PROLOGUE



PRESENT DAY, THURSDAY — 11:45 P.M.

Brian Jackson strolled into my office. He settled his tall, lanky body into the chair opposite my desk and chewed on an apple. He looked bored. It was a slow evening in the Beaumont P.D. It had been a slow week, too.

Our noon-to-midnight shift was almost over. It was Thursday, the last day of our four-day rotation, and I was feeling tired. We did four twelve-hour shifts a week, with three days off to rejuvenate. It worked out well for my husband Paul and me, as we took turns looking after our two school-aged children during the week. I got them off to school in the morning, and he took care of them after school.

Brian shifted in his chair as he flicked the apple core into the garbage can beside my desk. I looked up from my paperwork.

“What’s on your mind, pard?” I asked.

“Just wondering how you do it, day in, day out... same old stuff all the time. Don’t you get tired of it?”

“You lookin’ for some major crime action? Can’t blame you. Keeping the peace in a place like this won’t get the adrenalin pumping,” I said. “But we have had our share of interesting cases over the years, you know.”

Brian perked up. As a new recruit, Brian loved cop talk. He was always keen to hear about cases that involved more than routine police work.

“So, tell me, Dee-Dee, what’s the most intriguing case you ever worked on?” He was a fresh-faced twenty-two-year-old who had recently graduated from the police academy. He was assigned to me to “learn the ropes”, so to speak. I have a new recruit every couple of years and I help them through their probation period to get on permanent status. From there, they usually move on to bigger and nastier places for crime control, like Buffalo, Pittsburgh or New York City. Here in the back hills of the Adirondack Mountains, our crimes are garden variety: drugs, theft, domestic violence, drunk and disorderly and illegal gambling with the occasional knifing or shooting thrown in. You might call it Dullsville, if you were a cop.

I like it fine here. It suits me because I have two young kids, a boy and a girl, and I don’t want to raise them in a big city where they are exposed to serious social and criminal problems. A child’s time for pure innocence and joy of life is limited... why rob them of something so precious? For

the sake of ambition? Sure, I'm ambitious, but I'm also Italian by heritage, and family comes first, so I'm biding my time. When the kids are grown and off to college, then I'll be ready to make a move. In the meantime, I take university extension courses to improve my credentials, and one day, I hope to make Inspector or something even higher. For now, I have settled for a low-profile career as a cop in the Adirondacks.

After more than ten years in Beaumont, I've come to enjoy having a low-stress job that also allows me to have a decent family life. But when the occasional challenging criminal case comes my way... well, that's when my heart rate speeds up and I feel the primitive excitement of the hunt coursing through my veins. I think this passion comes from reading too many mysteries as a child. Nancy Drew and the Hardy Boys were my favorites. As a teenager, I moved on to Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot and Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes, and challenged myself to try and solve the crime before they did. Now, as an adult, I'm constantly searching for new murder mysteries to devour by authors like Harlan Coben and Linwood Barclay. Lately, I have been reading Scandinavian crime mysteries (in English, of course) for something a little different. I would certainly enjoy the intellectual challenge of solving difficult crimes in my jurisdiction, but unfortunately they are few and far between.

To break the monotony of life in Beaumont, we often get together at the local pub after our late shift... Brian, Captain Juno, myself and others. The stories we've told! Cap has the best stories from when he was a detective with the Chicago P.D.

"The most intriguing case," I mused, in response to Brian's question. "Let me see." I paused in my paperwork. I knew which case I wanted to talk about, but I needed to organize my thoughts first. How to tell young Brian about this one?

"The Digman/Boland file is probably the most intriguing case I worked on. Happened a few years ago, shortly after I made detective." I paused again, wondering if I should go down this road. It would take a few hours in the telling.

"So... what was so special about it?" he prodded.

I checked my watch. It was almost quitting time. I closed the binder I was working on and let my mind go back to December 2008, when the case fell into my lap.

"Well, let me start at the beginning. My partner and I were on our usual patrol one night in Mount Salem. It was a couple weeks before Christmas. We got a 911 call about two suspicious deaths at Kensington College."

I got up and went to a filing cabinet in the corner of my office. I opened the second drawer.

“I made photocopies of some of the media coverage. Was gonna make a scrapbook for my kids one day,” I said, chuckling. “Look at this... I have a drawer full of news reports.” I took out a folder and opened it.

“Sharon Sharpe, reporter at the *Beaumont Record* locked onto this case right from the start. She’s a thorn in Cap’s side, that one! Always calling him about something or other. I think she’s got a thing for him, you know. But he’s having none of it.” I read the clipping out loud.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2008

POLICE INVESTIGATE SUSPICIOUS DEATHS AT LOCAL COLLEGE

Late Wednesday night, police were called to Kensington College after two people collapsed and died while playing cards in the faculty dining room.

Details are sketchy, as the news came in just before our midnight press time.

Dr. Gayle Primrose, President of Kensington College, was present at the scene, along with 17 other people.

Captain Juno of the Beaumont Police Department had no comment, except to say the police were conducting preliminary interviews of eyewitnesses.

Detective Christina diLongo is in charge of the investigation. Our sources speculate that the deaths were not from natural causes.

“If you want me to tell you the whole story, let’s go for a beer after we sign out tonight,” I suggested. “We’ve got the next three days off, so we can afford a late night. I’ll text Paul and let him know.”

“Sounds great,” Brian said eagerly.

Half an hour later, with beers in hand, we settled into a booth at our local pub. I opened the folder of clippings.

“It was my first big case as a detective,” I began. “My partner at the time, Skip Crane, did some awesome background checking and helped me with some of the critical thinking that we needed to do. I conducted most of the interviews, and eventually we pieced together the whole sordid story. And it was quite a story! We made the national media by the time we

were through.” I chuckled at the recollection. “But it wasn’t very funny at the time. We were all stressed out to the max. Cap was breathing down my neck to wrap it up. He was getting heat from the media and higher-ups. And the parents of the college students were on his case. And, of course, he was worried about overtime.”

“Some things never change!” Brian commented, smiling wryly. Brian had been with us for only a week, but he’s a smart kid, and he had already picked up that Cap’s primary focus these days was working on the budget and keeping costs, especially overtime, at a minimum. Can’t blame him, really. With the local economy still in the soup, the tax base was eroding while crimes were on the upswing. Cap was in the pivot point between the two, and he found that position to be increasingly uncomfortable. However, in my opinion, it was more important than ever to keep law and order strong and viable in our communities, and that means more police vigilance, not less. It was an argument that Cap and I got into almost every week, as these budget restrictions made our jobs as enforcers difficult.

“There were twenty players in the bridge club, and two of the players died, which left me with eighteen witnesses. I didn’t know what I was investigating at first. Was it an accident, like food poisoning? Was it a deadly virus? Was it something more sinister? If it was homicide, then all my witnesses were suspects. We had to assume the worst and hope for the best. So we treated it like a crime scene, and waited for the M.E.’s report.”

“And what did the M.E.’s report tell you?” asked Brian. He leaned forward in his seat. I could tell he was eager to get this important detail, but it was way too soon to reveal that. To be fully appreciated, the story needed to be told from the beginning, and that would take some time.

“I’ll get to that! But first, I need to give you some background.”

I settled back on my bench. The news reports had refreshed my memory, and that energized me. I knew that once I got started with the details, it would be a long night.

“It all started with a Halloween party on October 31, 2007. The bridge players got dressed up like famous characters in the movies. It ended thirteen months later, with two people dead. And as I learned through the investigation, bridge players are not just a bunch of old timers sitting around in their retirement homes. Our investigation exposed hidden agendas, secret lives... all kinds of things you might find surprising!

“But I’m getting ahead of myself. To really understand this case, you have to know some things about the bridge club and how the players related to each other.”

“Okay,” said Brian. “I’m listening.”

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A DEADLY GAME.....

A mysterious illness... two dead bridge players... what's going on at Kensington College? On the surface, Kensington is a typical small U.S. college (although its President certainly considers it superior to most). But when two players collapse and die during a duplicate bridge game at the Faculty Club, it soon becomes clear that there is more to Kensington than meets the eye. It falls to Detective Christina diLongo to solve a case that is a far cry from the usual petty crime she encounters – a mystery that inevitably leads her to a close scrutiny of the bridge club and its members. But would anyone really commit murder over a bridge game?



CAROLE COPLEA (Oakville, Ontario, Canada) is an enthusiastic bridge player with a background in marketing. This is her first book.

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