

Death in Cottage Country

Suspended Sentences

by Jim Napier

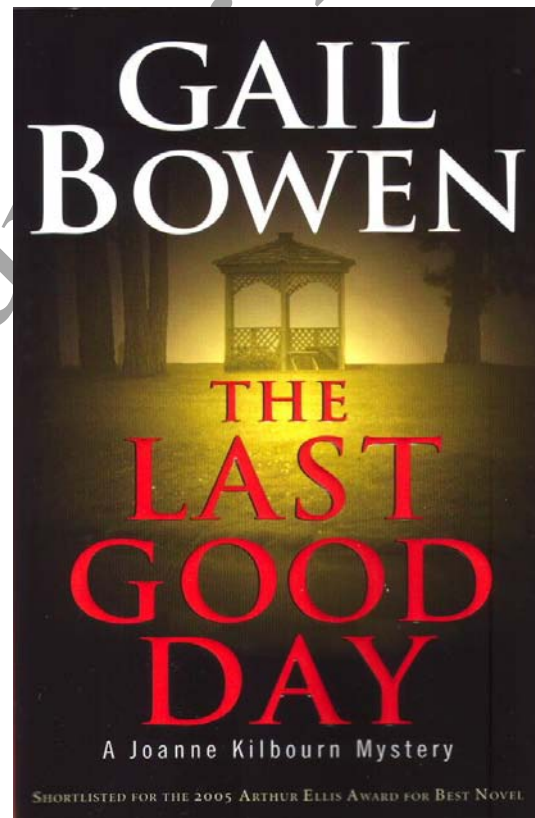
Mystery writers can be a strange lot. Where most people see the positive side of life, or at worst the humdrum, mystery writers see opportunities for murder and mayhem, conflict and corruption. A routine day at the office? Perhaps the accountant is cooking the books, and about to “do a bunk” with that sexy redhead in Reception. A casual visit to the shopping mall? An opportunity for Light-fingers Lou to switch bags in the dressing room while Madame is parading in front of a mirror, trying to decide whether that blue dress really flatters her figure. *Matins* at the local church? But hasn't that fellow in the fourth row of pews been there a very long time? And he doesn't seem to be moving....

This week's pick centers on another of our Great Canadian Institutions: a summer trip to the cottage with the kids. But in the talented hands of Gail Bowen, it is anything but a typical family getaway, as death stalks the woods.

Gail Bowen

Some people's fate is written in the wind. It must have been evident from an early age that Gail Bowen was destined for special things when she learned to read by perusing tombstones at the tender age of three! Two years later, however, fate threw her a curve, and Gail contracted polio at a time — the mid 1940's — when it was often a death

sentence. Determined to dominate her illness, Gail read voraciously during her forced confinement. Years later she enrolled at the University of Toronto, completing a B.A. in English. She went on to earn a Master's degree from the University of Waterloo before undertaking doctoral studies at the University of Saskatchewan. Ending her studies,



she took a variety of teaching posts across Saskatchewan, eventually becoming a tenured professor in the English Department at the University of Regina. She moved on to become an Associate Professor and (until recently) Head of the English Department at First

Nations University of Canada, as well as a respected novelist. Her life is a lesson in courage and determination for us all.

Gail's Joanne Kilbourn Mystery series is rapidly becoming a Canadian institution, several of her novels having appeared as made-for-television movies on CTV. Her books are unique in Canadian crime fiction for their revealing portrayal of the complexities of human relations set against the background of urban prairie life. *A Colder Kind of Death* won the Arthur Ellis Award for Best Novel (1995), and *The Last Good Day* was shortlisted for the 2005 Arthur Ellis Award for Best Novel. She lives in Regina with her husband, Ted.

The Last Good Day
(McClelland & Stewart, 2004)

On a lake near Regina, Joanne Kilbourn and her two children (a ten-year-old daughter, and an almost-grown son) have rented a cottage in a small, exclusive enclave known as Lawyer's Bay. Joanne looks forward to bonding with her children and communing with nature during the waning days of summer. Their tranquility is shattered, however, when Christopher Altieri, a lawyer she had met only the day before, drives off the end of a dock and drowns. Reflecting on their conversation convinces Joanne that Chris's death was no accident, and she delves into the private lives of the members of the cottage community, determined to discover what terrible secret could have prompted a bright and likeable man, with an established partnership in one of the city's most prestigious law firms, to suddenly end his life. To do so she must navigate the murky waters of the troubled law firm and its quirky members, each with their own stories to tell or to

conceal. She discovers that Clare Mackey, a junior member of the firm, had disappeared months earlier, and her uneasiness grows when Joanne learns that her own former lover, a police detective, had unaccountably discouraged further investigation into Mackey's disappearance. As Joanne delves into the missing woman's background the many threads of this story converge on the secluded community known as Lawyer's Bay, and yet more violence lies in store. In the normally placid waters of cottage country, Shakespeare's dictum, "First, let's kill all the lawyers," threatens to become literally true....

Captures the atmosphere

Gail Bowen successfully captures the atmosphere of cottage-country life, and melds it seamlessly with a gripping mystery set among the upper-class denizens of a gated community. A morality play that pits a person of principle against an antagonist who is both ambitious and ruthless, and which culminates in a final, desperate act of violence, *The Last Good Day* is a thoroughly good read, one that will have the reader clamouring for more. Fortunately the tenth Joanne Kilbourn novel, "The Endless Knot" will be published by McClelland & Stewart this September.

Jim Napier can be reached at
jim.napier52@gmail.com