

# Last Resort

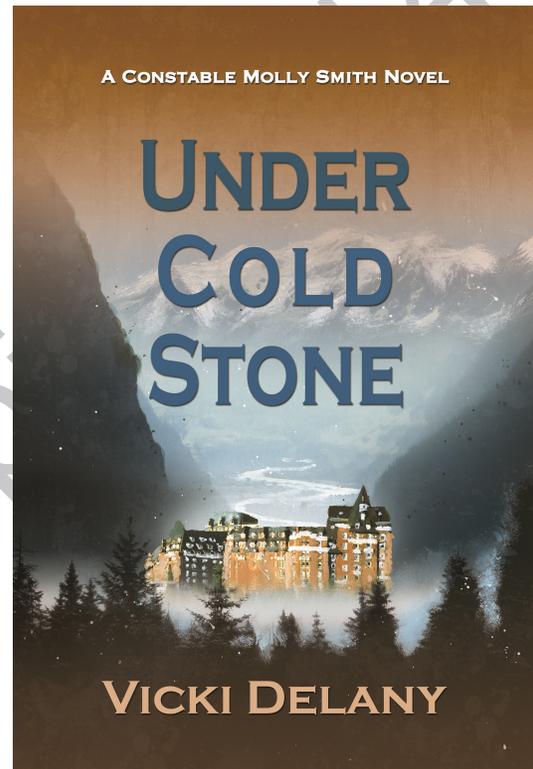
## *Iconic Banff Springs the setting for murder*

### *Suspended Sentences*

by Jim Napier

Since 2007 Canadian crime writer Vicki Delany has been entertaining readers with her Constable Molly Smith series, set in Trafalgar, in the mountains of scenic British Columbia. The idyllic setting serves as a contrasting backdrop for the town's more-than-ample share of criminal deeds, and Molly Smith heads an engaging list of recurring characters that includes her ex-hippie mother Lucky (who insists on calling her daughter Moon-beam), Paul Keller, who's currently dating Molly's mother, and Sergeant John Winters, the lone detective on the town's tiny force.

The seventh in the Molly Smith series, this outing finds Molly struggling with a frozen turkey for her and Adam Tocek's first Thanksgiving dinner, while her widowed mother Lucky is in the Rocky Mountains resort town of Banff, Alberta, enjoying the sites with her companion Paul Keller. Regular readers will recall that



it's an odd-couple relationship: Keller is a by-the-book cop, Lucky a back-to-the-earth hippie and unrepentant environmentalist. The pair are in Banff Alberta for a pleasant weekend getaway, that is, until Lucky is bullied by Barry Caseman, a rude young local who tries to cut in line in a local café.

The event threatens to escalate into a confrontation until Caseman's friend calls him off. Later, that man is identified as Keller's estranged son, Matt. But before the chief can reunite with his son Caseman's body is found on the floor of their shared apartment. He'd been fatally stabbed, and Matt is missing, giving rise to an obvious question: is Matt a killer, or a victim?

An experienced mountaineer, some of Matt's equipment is also missing. The most plausible explanation is that he's fled into the back country. As his son is at the very least a material witness to Caseman's death, Paul Keller is sidelined in the investigation. Anxious to help, Lucky contacts her daughter Molly, who abandons her Thanksgiving dinner and heads for Banff with her dog, Sylvester.

Banff is a world-class resort, featuring spectacular mountain scenery and the Banff Springs Hotel, where Paul and Lucky are staying. Beneath the surface, however, it's still got small-town problems, with seasonal staff working at minimum wage and sharing accommodation to make ends meet. There's a shadow economy as well, that most tourists never see; it includes car rental agencies, dodgy repair shops, and blue-collar watering holes that cater largely to the locals. Molly

learns from one of Barry's roommates that he always seemed to have extra money, raising questions about how he came by it. Sidelined in the investigation, Paul Keller asks Detective Sergeant John Winters to check Matt's records; it's not long before Winters finds that Caseman had a string of convictions for theft, sexual assault, and drunk-and-disorderlies. Unfortunately, Matt's record is also far from spotless.

Adding to the undercurrents of the case Keller's ex-wife Karen shows up at the hotel in the wake of her son's disappearance. Karen had thrown Paul Keller over for a well-to-do businessman, Jonathan Burgess, and by all appearances doesn't seem to be suffering. But although she was the one who walked, she seems to be harboring a grudge against Lucky, adding another level of tension to the already-stressful situation.

Meanwhile, back in Trafalgar, John Winters has his hands full. Environmental protesters have descended on the proposed Grizzly Resort site. The company has an ambitious plan to develop a complex featuring 250 cottages on the site, plus swimming pools and restaurants, and all the other amenities that city-types vacationing in the country would not want to go without. Predictably, the plan has attracted opposition. An

out-of-town activist named Robyn Winfield, with a record of stirring up trouble, has been seen in the area in the company of a man suspected of conducting a campaign of violent intimidation against tar sands workers. More than enough, then, to keep Winters busy as the authorities in Banff try to run Matt Keller to earth.

Beginning with believable characters drawn into compelling conflict, and adding personal backstories to sustain the suspense, *Under Cold Stone* is vintage Delany. She skillfully uses current issues, set against the spectacular

backdrop of the Canadian Rockies, to fashion a tale that will resonate with readers in search of an intelligent story that is also simply a fine read. *Under Cold Stone* cements Delany's position as one of Canada's most talent crime writers. First-time readers will want to look into her other crime fiction writing, which includes her Klondike Mystery series (four at last count), and several standalones as well.

Vicki Delany, *Under Cold Stone*  
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Since 2005 Jim Napier's reviews and interviews have appeared in several Canadian newspapers and on such websites as *Spinetingler*, *The Rap Sheet*, *Shots Magazine*, *Crime Time*, *Reviewing The Evidence*, *January Magazine*, and the *Montreal Review of Books*, as well as on his own award-winning site, *Deadly Diversions*. He can be reached at [jnapier@deadlydiversions.com](mailto:jnapier@deadlydiversions.com)

