

# Resort to Murder

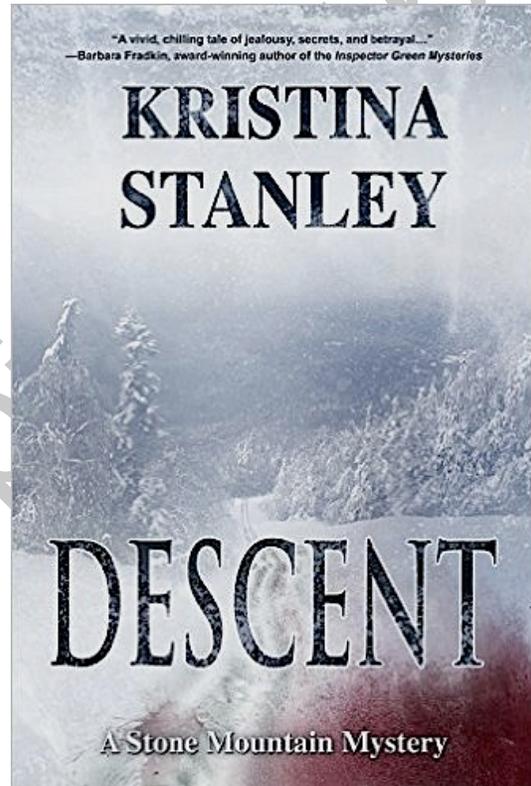
*All the competition isn't on the slopes*

*Suspended Sentences*

by Jim Napier

Canadian writer Kristina Stanley has drawn on her personal experience for *Descent*, the latest in her Stone Mountain Mystery Series. The story follows Kalin Thompson, the head of human resources at a ski resort high in the mountains of British Columbia. Only four days earlier Tom Bennett, the director of security, had suffered a heart attack, and despite immediate medical care he had died shortly afterwards. Impressed with Kalin's handling of the situation the owner of the resort, Gavin Reed, calls her into his office and asks her to take over Bennett's role.

Several world-class racing teams are at Stone Mountain training for upcoming competitions. A racer on one team, Steve McKenzie, ascends the hill to take a practice run. The surface is hard, making the speeds intentionally fast. But on his way down one of his boots releases from its binding, and McKenzie crashes, his head slamming hard into the ice-packed surface.



Kalin's boyfriend, Ben Tamlin, is head of the mountain's ski patrol, as well as deputy chief of the resort's volunteer fire department. He's on the scene immediately, and confirms that nothing can be done: McKenzie is dead.

The team coach is outraged. He threatens to sue the resort, claiming the surface was unsafe.

Gavin Reed goes into full damage control: although the RCMP will be looking into McKenzie's death, Reed asks Kalin Thompson to follow the investigation closely and keep him fully informed. Kalin wonders if Reed has more than a professional stake in the outcome.

The resort harbors more than its share of secrets. McKenzie had been an experienced racer, unlikely to have misadjusted his bindings; and from the outset there is suspicion that McKenzie's boot had been tampered with. When the RCMP confirms his equipment had been sabotaged suspicion focuses on his ex-girlfriend, Nora Cummings, who had been responsible for tuning his skis. Nora conceals the fact that she's pregnant, and that when she told McKenzie he denied the baby was his and dumped her.

Adding further fuel to the wintery fire, we learn that McKenzie had been competing with another local, Jeff Morley, for a spot on the team, as had Gavin Reed's own son, Ian. And a former girlfriend of Ben's, Vicky Hamilton, has suddenly reappeared at the resort and is making no bones about wanting to pick up her relationship with Ben. All in all, Kalin Thompson is quickly learning that both her new job and her personal life are very much up in the air.

*Descent* is a hybrid mystery/romance fiction tale, and sometimes the romantic elements take center stage. Nonetheless it is on the whole a well-crafted, fast-paced tale strengthened by a strong sense of atmosphere and the color provided by an insider's knowledge of the world of ski resorts.

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Previously published on the *Ottawa Review of Books*, January, 2016.

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, the *Montreal Review of Books*, the *Ottawa Review of Books*, and *Amazon.com*, as well as on his own award-winning crime fiction site, *Deadly Diversions*. He can be reached at [jnapier@deadlydiversions.com](mailto:jnapier@deadlydiversions.com)