



Dead and Berried (The Gray Whale Inn Mysteries)

By Karen MacInerney



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When Charlene's lover—the handsome chaplain with a stake in the development—is stabbed to death, Natalie promises to find the murderer for her griefstricken friend, who's also the number-one suspect.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Critically acclaimed author Karen MacInerney also teaches writers' workshops and drives a mean carpool. Her book *Murder on the Rocks* was selected as an Agatha nominee for Best First Novel. When she's not writing or chauffeuring children, she loves to read, drink coffee, attempt unusual recipes, and hit the local hike-and-bike trail. She lives in Austin, Texas, with her husband, two children, and a rabbit named Bunny, and escapes to Maine as often as possible.

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o n e

I had gotten used to nighttime noises. When you live in a 150-year-old inn, you do. Guests bang around in their rooms, the pipes thump and clank in the walls, and the wind sometimes moans as it slithers past the eaves.

But I'd never heard anything from the attic before.

I sat bolt upright and glanced at the clock on the night table.

3:32. Biscuit hissed at the ceiling, her eyes glowing in the clock's greenish light. I fumbled for the bedside lamp and switched it on. The tabby's ginger-colored tail had puffed up to three times its normal size, and the fur on her back bristled.

Blood thundered in my ears as I sat motionless, listening. The waves slip-slapped against the rocks below the inn, and a stray breeze whispered past the window, but the ceiling above me lay silent. As the minutes stretched by, my body relaxed. It was prob-ably just the wind.

I was reaching to turn off the light when it happened again. A soft thump, right over my head. I jerked my arm back and grabbed a fistful of down comforter, pulling it up to my chin. There had been nothing in the "How to Run a Bed and Breakfast" manual about dealing with freeloading guests in the attic. Or ghosts.

Several months ago, as we sat in the warm yellow kitchen downstairs, my friend Charlene had told me that the inn was sup-posed to be haunted. Since the only annoying manifestations to date had been demanding guests who didn't pay their bills, I had shrugged it off.

The whole ghost idea had a bit more credence alone in my bedroom on a moonless October night. My tongue felt thick in my mouth as I swallowed. A moment later, the thump was fol-lowed by a creak from the boards above my bed.

Biscuit bolted from the bed and scabbled at the bedroom door. A creak answered from above, and she made a low sound deep in her throat before abandoning the door to scuttle under the white dust ruffle of my bed. I wanted to cram myself in beside her, but I didn't think I'd fit.

My eyes shot to the phone on the dresser. I could call my neighbor, John. He was the island's deputy. He would be here in five minutes, and I could join Biscuit under the bed and let him deal with the attic.

It was tempting, but I hesitated. John and I had started seeing each other recently, and I didn't want him to think I was pulling the damsel-in-distress routine. I glanced down at my faded flannel nightshirt. If John did come over, it would be pretty obvious that seduction wasn't my goal. Or that if it was, I wasn't very good at it.

I listened for a few moments more, but whatever was up there had fallen silent. Why had I tossed out my pepper spray? When I lived in Texas, I kept a small canister in my night table drawer. While packing to move to Maine, though, I pitched it, along with several pairs of legwarmers and the paperback edition of *The Smart Woman's Guide to Finding Mr. Right*.

Tonight, as I slipped out from under the covers and eased my-self onto the icy wood floor, I was wishing I hadn't been so thor-ough. Another board creaked overhead. Adrenaline shot through me. Pepper spray probably wasn't effective on ghosts anyway. If it was a ghost.

The cold air on the bare skin of my calves made my goose bumps grow a few sizes larger as I slid open the night table drawer and dug for the flashlight. Power outages on Cranberry Island were common enough that I kept a flashlight by the bed, and my hand quickly closed on the familiar plastic cylinder. I flicked the switch. Nothing.

Cursing, I rifled through the drawer again. My hand closed on a matchbox and I was fumbling for a candle when I spotted an old book light in the jumble. I grabbed it and flipped it open. A weak circle of watery light gleamed on the floor. It would have to do.

I crept to the bedroom door and turned the cold knob. The door squeaked as it swung open, and something brushed against my ankle. A scream froze in my throat when I glimpsed a flash of orange tearing down the hall.

I was headed toward the attic, but Biscuit wasn't about to join me. For the first time, I wished I had chosen a large dog, some-thing in the Doberman family, instead of a chubby orange tabby cat as an animal companion.

As I tiptoed down the hallway toward the hatch in the ceiling, something clattered above me. Ghost, my mind whispered. Pol-tergeist. I hadn't thought about ghost stories for years, but now my mind churned up every spooky tale I had ever heard: the footsteps of small children, desperate to escape from phantom flames; the shades of women murdered by jealous husbands; tortured souls who had hanged themselves in a basement or an attic. An attic.

Nonsense. How could you walk across the attic if you were stuck hanging from the rafters? It was probably just a squirrel. A big squirrel.

As I reached for the pull cord, I reflected that I hadn't seen any squirrels around the Gray Whale Inn. The ceiling creaked again as my hand closed around the end of the string. If whatever was up there was a squirrel, it had been doing some major steroids.

I drew a ragged breath and jerked the hatch down toward me. The rusted hinges screeched in protest. I yanked the ladder open, and a black hole yawned above me. I thrust the book light up and played the feeble beam over the dusty rafters. Nothing. I fought the urge to run back to my room and bury myself under the cov-ers. Instead, I forced one shaky foot onto the bottom rung.

You're a thirty-nine-year-old woman. Whatever's up there, you can handle it. I climbed the ladder cautiously, and my head was soon immersed in cold, empty darkness. I shone the pale light all around the attic. The

wavering beam illuminated two broken ladder-back chairs, a rusted iron headboard, and a dilapidated hatbox. The air shuddered out of my chest. It must have been a squirrel, after all.

Then I ran the beam across the floorboards above my bedroom.

I knew I had heard footsteps. But the thin film of dust on the floor above my room lay undisturbed. I woke the next morning with a start. It was 7:40; I had overslept by more than an hour. I hurled myself out of bed, wriggled into a pair of jeans and a sweatshirt, and sprinted down the stairs to the kitchen. In the pale light of morning, last night's wild imaginings seemed far away. The early sun reflected off the antique pine floors, making the buttery yellow walls glow. As I filled the coffeemaker's glass carafe and glanced at the mound of sheets and towels peeking out from behind the laundry room door, I felt a twinge of misgiving. Polly Sarkes usually came and helped me with the laundry twice a week, but she hadn't shown up yesterday morning.

Polly had lived on the island her entire life. Her broad, cheerful face, surrounded by a halo of hair that frizzed up when it was humid, was a welcome sight in the mornings—and she was a housecleaning whiz. I'd hired her in July, when the number of dirty towels the inn produced started to give me nightmares about piles of soiled linens creeping up the stairs to smother me in my bed. Although the laundry had receded to a manageable level and I no longer needed help—in fact, I really couldn't afford it—I knew that Polly needed the work, and I couldn't bring myself to let her go.

In her early forties, Polly had never married, devoting her substantial warmth and affection to the cats she cared for. Polly was practical, cheerful, and very thorough. Which was why I was worried; it wasn't like Polly not to show up without calling, and she wasn't answering her phone.

My eyes lingered on the overflowing laundry baskets. If Polly didn't call this morning, I would go looking for her.

A few minutes later, the soothing aroma of freshly ground Moka Java and the reassuring gurgle of the coffeemaker filled the kitchen.

I reached into the refrigerator and pulled out eggs and butter for Peach Sunrise Coffee Cake, one of my favorite recipes. I glanced at the clock; it was already a quarter to eight. If I hurried, I could have the cake out of the oven just before nine. Breakfast officially started at 8:30, but with any luck, my guests would come down late.

The summer season at the Gray Whale Inn, the bed and breakfast I had started six months earlier, had been good, but the steady stream of guests had dried to a trickle after Labor Day. My stomach lurched when I thought of the unbooked months ahead. Between the heating bills and the mortgage, I needed at least a few guests over the winter if I wanted the inn to survive until spring. Maybe I would have to look for a part-time job. Doing what, I wondered? Knitting hats for the local gift shop? I didn't knit, but if the bookings didn't start coming, there might be plenty of time to learn.

I was searching for the sour cream when the kitchen door creaked behind me. I whirled around, heart thumping, but it was only Biscuit. She gazed up at me with wide green eyes and meowed as she sidled over to me, wrapping herself around my calves as if she hadn't abandoned me in my hour of need. "Traitor," I muttered as I bent down and rubbed her head.

As I filled a bowl with dry cat food and pushed the pantry door closed, the creak of the hinges sent a chill down my back. I thought what I'd heard last night had come from the attic, but could it have been something on the roof? I shivered slightly as I unwrapped the butter and plopped it into a large bowl. I didn't believe in

ghosts, but last night had given me the creeps.

I glanced out the window. The rising sun had ignited the russet and gold of Mount Cadillac on the mainland, and the stretch of cold seawater beneath it was stippled with the pale peach of early morn-ing. I tore my eyes from the window and rooted through the drawer for the beaters. There would be plenty of time to admire the view later. I had just located the beaters when the kitchen door creaked again.

I turned quickly, brandishing a wooden spoon, and stifled a groan. So much for late-rising guests. Candy Perkins stood at the door, a pink tee shirt stretched tight across her ample bosom. Her bright, cotton-candy smile and artificially rosy cheeks made her look like an overgrown Shirley Temple. My eyes drifted toward her chest. A well-developed, overgrown Shirley Temple.

"Good morning, Nat!" She spoke in a squeaky, bubbly voice I had always associated with teenaged girls. She walked over to the well-scrubbed pine farm table, pulled out a sparkly notepad and a purple pen, and sat down.

Her curly blonde hair was still wet from a shower and framed her round, pink face like a mass of corkscrews. My eyes strayed down to her tee shirt; today's slogan was "Girls Just Want to Have Funds." "Hi, Candy." I tried to return her perky smile. "You're up early."

"I hope you don't mind," she chirped. "I thought I'd watch you go through your morning routine and take some notes." Candy had been staying at the inn for three days now. She was an aspiring bed-and-breakfast owner, and had decided to pick the Gray Whale Inn as a study subject. At first, I had been flattered. But after sev-enty-two hours of Candy watching my every move, I was feeling a bit stifled. "Mind if I have a cup of coffee?" she asked.

I nodded toward the coffee pot. "Help yourself. Mugs are up on the shelf. Cream is in the fridge, and the sugar bowl is next to the pot."

"Oh, no sugar and cream for me." She patted her flat belly lightly. "Carbs go right to my waistline." As she trotted past me toward the coffee, she peered at the mixing bowl with interest. "What are we making today?"

"Peach Sunrise Coffee Cake," I said, determined to be friendly. "It's one of my favorite recipes."

"Wow," she said, surveying the ingredients. "That's a lot of but-ter. And sour cream, too?"

"Uh-huh." I lowered the beaters into the bowl and grimaced. Nothing spoiled a good coffee cake like a skinny person looking over your shoulder and staging an impromptu lecture on the dan-gers of fat grams and carbohydrates. Candy hadn't reached her stride on the subject yet, but I knew it was imminent.

Candy poured herself a cup of coffee and minced back to the table as the beaters whirled, transforming the eggs and milk into a pale gold liquid. I turned the mixer off and reached for the flour, blotting all thoughts of calories from my mind and anticipating the flavor of the moist cake, drenched in butter and brown sugar and studded with peaches.

Candy's voice floated over my shoulder. "What else is on the menu?"

I glanced back at her. "Cheesy scrambled eggs, sausage patties, and broiled grapefruit."

Candy's eyes flitted to my waist, which I had to admit was a bit larger than it used to be. "Gosh. I don't know how I'm going to keep my figure in this business," she said.

I tugged down my sweatshirt and turned on the mixer again as I assembled the dry components. I was pleased to discover that the whirl of the beaters made further conversation impossible. By the time I turned the mixer off, the eggs and milk were practically foam.

"Have you ever considered low-carb breakfasts?" Candy piped up as soon as the beaters stopped. She looked pointedly at my midriff. "It might help."

I smiled and turned the beaters back on again while I cut the butter into the flour mixture, letting them run until the last possible moment. The cake might be a tad chewy, but the silence was worth it.

Quickly, I assembled the layers of batter, peaches, and rasp-berry cream. I had just poured the last of the batter over the rows of sliced peaches and slid the pan into the oven when the phone rang. I said a small prayer of thanks—now that the mixer was off, I could see Candy preparing to launch into her favorite topic again—and grabbed for the receiver.

"Good afternoon, Gray Whale Inn."

"Afternoon? It's not even eight o'clock." I smiled at the bright voice of my best friend, Charlene Kean. In addition to her duties as postmistress and gossip queen, she also owned and ran the only grocery store in town. She wasn't what I had expected in a Mainer—her taste in clothes was more Neiman Marcus than L. L. Bean, and she regularly took large consignments of Mary Kay cosmetics—but we had become fast friends almost from the moment I set foot on the island.

"Sorry, Charlene. I'm a little short on sleep." I cracked an egg into a large mixing bowl as I spoke. I was about to tell Charlene about the noises in the attic, but glanced at Candy, whose blue eyes were still tracking me, and stopped myself. "What's up?" I asked instead.

"I didn't get a chance to call you yesterday, but I've got a special delivery down here for you," she said.

"A special delivery? What is it?"

"I don't know, but it's in a styrofoam cooler. Says it has to be frozen after forty-eight hours. I stuck it in the freezer. The return address is some town in Texas."

Texas? I had spent fifteen years working for the Texas Department of Parks and Wildlife in Austin, but I wasn't expecting any deliveries from that part of the world.

I emptied another egg and discarded the shell. "That's strange."

"Do you want me to bring it out to you?" Charlene asked. "Or are you coming down to the store later?"

I eyed the tub of home-baked toffee squares I had been planning to take down to Charlene's that afternoon. In addition to the coffee cakes and scones my kitchen produced for inn guests, I often made treats to sell at the store for a few extra dollars—and to entice people to stay at the inn. So far it hadn't worked out too well—usually Charlene ate them all and then complained about how her pants were fitting—but I was still trying.

"I'll probably be down as soon as breakfast is over," I said. "By the way, have you heard from Polly?"

"No, I haven't. Why?"

"I'm worried about her. She was supposed to come over and help with the laundry Monday, but she never

showed. If she doesn't turn up today, I'm going down to check out her house."

"Weird. That's not like her. I'll ask around and see what I can find out."

"Thanks," I said, cracking the last egg and reaching for the milk. "How was your date with the good reverend last night?"

Charlene's voice perked up. "Richard? He took me to the lobster pound." To the envy of most of the women on Cranberry Island, Charlene had started seeing Reverend Richard McLaughlin, the charming Episcopal priest who had recently been assigned to the island. When he took up his post at St. James in August, women who hadn't been to church since they were baptized suddenly started finding religion.

"I didn't know clergy salaries were that good," I teased, grabbing a package of sausages from the freezer and plunking the frozen links into a cast-iron pan. "So how'd it go?"

"It was fabulous," Charlene breathed. "Just fabulous. Richard's such a wonderful guy—sincere, caring, compassionate . . ."

"And not too bad in the looks department either," I added. Richard McLaughlin's wavy black hair, deep brown eyes, and sonorous voice had done much to increase Sunday attendance at St. James. According to Charlene, sales of lipstick had tripled since he took up residence in the rectory.

"Tell me about it," Charlene said. "When I went to services last Sunday, he gave me a big hug instead of the usual handshake. I swear, half the women there looked like they wanted to skewer me alive."

I pried the sausages apart with a spatula and laughed. "I'll bet."

Charlene's sassy voice was dreamy. "You know, he is handsome, but what I like the most about him is that he has vision. He really sees the beauty of the island and what a wonderful community it is. He was telling me it would be a sin not to share it with the rest of the world."

I cleared my throat. I wasn't sure what she was talking about, but it didn't sound good. "What do you mean, share it with the rest of the world?"

She took a deep breath. "Well, I know we've been against bringing more people to the island in the past . . ."

"You mean Premier Resorts?" I was thinking of the developer who had almost managed to buy the land next to the inn. He had planned to replace the colony of endangered terns that nested there with a golf resort, and Charlene and I had both opposed the development. The developer had come to an unfortunate end, but the rest of the story had concluded happily. A conservation group bought the land, ensuring that both the terns and the rest of the island would remain unmolested by golfers in polyester shirts.

"No, no, no," she protested. "This would be completely different."

The sausages started to sizzle, and I pushed them around in the pan. "What would be different?"

"Weintroub Development's subdivision. The one on the old cranberry bog."

"You mean Cranberry Estates? Murray Selfridge's pet project?" Murray Selfridge was one of the island's three selectmen. He had bought a lot of land over the years, and had recently started courting developers in hopes of making a big profit on it. His bid to bring in the golf resort had failed, but he was encouraging the board to look for other projects that would "improve the quality of life on the island." I gazed out the window

at a trio of seagulls wheeling in the breeze. How could it be possible to improve the quality of life on the island? Other than providing a subsidy for winter heating bills, that is.

"You're in favor of Murray's new money-making development scheme?" I said, glancing at Candy and wishing she would go somewhere else. She blinked her big blue Shirley Temple eyes at me. I turned to look out the window instead, entertaining a brief fantasy involving Candy, the Good Ship Lollipop, and a plank.

"It's not all about money," Charlene said tartly, pulling me back to reality. "Richard was saying that island communities have been diminishing for years. Look at what happened to Swan Island, and Isle au Haut. They're both deserted. The same thing could happen to Cranberry Island. There are hardly enough families here to keep the island alive."

"And building a subdivision of million-dollar summer homes will help remediate this?" I asked dryly.

"They'll all be winterized," she said quickly. "And besides, some of them are quite moderately priced."

"Moderately priced?" I shook my head in disbelief. "How do you support a \$600,000 mortgage on Cranberry Island? The only thing I can think of is drug running." I knew Richard was a smooth talker, but I couldn't believe Charlene had succumbed to his honeyed tongue. Richard had come to the clergy late in life, after a long and very successful career selling bathroom fixtures. Evidently he had created quite an empire before he had a change of heart and entered the seminary. I had often wondered how he felt about being sent to Cranberry Island, which had a year-round population of just over a hundred people. I suspected his support for Murray Selfridge's plan might be his way of starting to build another empire.

Charlene continued. "The development's goal is to bring new families to the island, new kids to the school." I had to admit that the year-round population was an issue. Enrollment at the island's one-room school had peaked at seven a couple of years ago, but with the loss of another two families to the mainland, that number had dropped down to four.

"And to line Murray Selfridge's pockets," I reminded her.

"Progress and profit can go together," she said primly.

"My God, Charlene. You sound like a brochure."

"I knew you wouldn't understand," she sniffed. "Your package will be here when you get here." The phone clicked in my ear, and Charlene's voice was replaced by a dial tone. My best friend had just hung up on me.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Lisa Knight:

A lot of people always spent their own free time to vacation or perhaps go to the outside with them family or their friend. Were you aware? Many a lot of people spent these people free time just watching TV, or playing video games all day long. If you need to try to find a new activity that's look different you can read the book. It is really fun in your case. If you enjoy the book you read you can spent all day long to reading a e-book. The book Dead and Berried (The Gray Whale Inn Mysteries) it is rather good to read. There are a lot of people who recommended this book. These were enjoying reading this book. In the event you did not have enough space bringing this book you can buy the particular e-book. You can m0ore easily to read this book

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