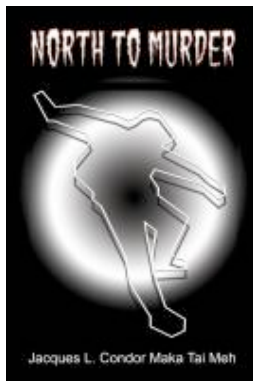


NORTH TO MURDER



Jacques L. Condor Maka Tai Meh



Alaska can be a deadly place. The real dangers for Alaskan residents are other residents. Murder seems to be the solution to many problems. A motive can be found in all seven deadly sins and the base emotions. The most surprising thing is how many murderers are never caught. The stories in this collection are about Alaskans who kill and get away with it. The tales were created from both fact and fiction.

North to Murder

Order the complete book from

[Booklocker.com](http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/8027.html?s=pdf)

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/8027.html?s=pdf>

**or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.**

Your free excerpt appears below. Enjoy!

NORTH TO MURDER

Jacques L. Condor
Maka Tai Meh

Copyright © 2015 Jacques Condor

ISBN 978-1-63490-012-6

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

Published by Condor Mountain Press

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper.

The characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the author.

Condor Mountain Press
2015

First Edition

Contact the author at:
waltergoralski@yahoo.com or makataimeh@earthlink.net

1: THE MUD BELOW

Aurelia relaxed the grip of her naked thighs against the brass pole and slid seductively onto the stage floor. She rolled on her stomach and then arched her pelvic area; her buttocks facing the audience. She matched the undulating and flexing of her bared rear to the shimmer of the cymbals from the club drummer in the pit. She glanced backward at the audience of men she saw in the down-glare of the trio of baby spots fixed on center stage. Aurelia turned her head and let her long dark hair fall over her face. She raised one hand and pushed the black cascade away and flashed her eyes in an unmistakable invitation to sex. Her routine never varied. The men howled and applauded between whistles. The club band in the pit launched into the last bars of her strip. She had just six counts of eight to finish the number. Then it was all over until midnight, when she'd have to do the whole damned dance over again; sixteen long minutes in front of a bunch of testosterone-jazzed freaks who sat out there in the dark ogling her. She pulled the thick feather boa between her legs up and through the cleavage of her purchased silicone breasts. This was the cue, Danny, the light-man in the booth at the back of the club waited for. The blue spotlights dimmed and went out. An overhead down spot totally flooded her pale skin with a vibrant blood red light. She heard the drums thump a final last beat and waited for the down spot to cut out. It was over. During the blackout she pushed through the hidden opening in the black velour drapes. The strippers use this exit to escape to the quiet and safety of the dressing rooms.

The hoots and the whistles faded. Aurelia knew clusters of men out there in the dimness of the club were clapping and yelling for 'more, more'. *What the hell more could she give the bastards? She was bare-assed and ogled. What more did they want?? To hell with the horny idiots. They could go fuck themselves or each other for all she cared. As for the applause, fuck that too; it was the money she made in*

this crummy strip-bar that kept her here. The money and maybe that potential new sugar-daddy she'd seen sitting out front.

The potential boyfriend was there at the bar again tonight. This was four nights in a row he had paid the ridiculously high cover the owner of the *Pink Pussy Cat* charged—*just to see me*—she thought. *I think I'm going to fall in love*, she said to herself. *Gawd! He looks damned rich; expensive suit and two hundred dollar shoes; nice salon haircut, too.*

Mindy, Alicia, Connie and Athena, all fellow artistes in the stripper circuit, waited in the dressing room. The five of them were on the bill of the *Pink Pussy Cat* for the next six months and spent most of their waking hours together. They weren't really friends. In the world of strippers, friends were something you couldn't afford. They fought over seating in the dressing room, quarreled over imagined plagiarism of moves and routines and most of all, they fought over billing. That's why most of the girls in the strip circuit adopted names beginning with the letter 'A'. This ploy usually guaranteed top billing. Top billing could mean an extra hundred or two a week. Aurelia had top billing at the *Pink Pussy Cat* and at the other three strip-bars run by Joe Bucherri in Anchorage. Joe rotated one or two girls from one club to another every six weeks or so. Aurelia had a contract for top billing in all the clubs. She wasn't about to relinquish it to any other stripper, anywhere in town, no matter what she had to do. The girls did help each other through the slumps and dumps of depression that came as part of the package when you took all your clothes off every night, including Sundays, for men you'd never seen before but who paid to see every inch of you. The girls were paid well for stripping. All four made salaries in excess of \$750 a week, and that didn't include tips for drinking and mingling with the men Joe told them to favor between sets. Aurelia hurried up the stairs. She heard Mindy's voice raised in anger as she gave someone hell in the dressing room.

"Don't give me any shit, Connie!" Mindy said. "You're drunk and you don't work a show drunk. You know better than that."

"Fuck you, *Princess Mindy*," Connie's words were slurred. "Who the hell died and made you queen? I'll drink when I want. I don't need you running my life. You're not my goddammed mother, bitch."

Aurelia sucked in her breath and held it; waiting for the sound of the smack Mindy's hand would make against Connie's cheek. None came. Relieved, Aurelia let her breath out, pushed aside the door curtain and slipped into the dressing room. "What's wrong now?" She asked. "I'm gone for one set and the four of you start fighting. Joe warned us about that."

"*Está la boracha, como siempre. Otra vez,*" Alicia lisped her Spanish reply. "Connie, she has—how you say, 'hit the bottles again.'"

"I'll give you a 'how you say', you fat Spanish cow! Mind your own friggin' business!" Connie tried to stand up but Aurelia pushed her down in her chair. "Athena, get me the thermos of coffee out of my bag. We've got an hour to sober this one up." Athena brought the coffee. "Drink! And keep drinking until it's empty," Aurelia said.

"I don't have to listen to you," Connie sputtered against the mouth of the thermos Aurelia held to her lips. "Yes you do," Athena said. "We all agreed Aurelia is in charge. We voted that way, remember."

"I didn't vote for shit." Connie said. Aurelia tilted the thermos against her mouth again. "That's the trouble with you, Connie; you never go along with the rest of us. You're too much of a prima-fucking-donna—and I am sick and tired of your '*I'm gonna get top billing*' tricks you're trying to pull on Joe."

"Up yours, Aurelia. One of these nights I *am* gonna get the top bill. You'll be out the extra dough and it'll be going into my pay envelope, bitch."

"Shut up and drink," Mindy said. "And when you finish the coffee, go outside with Alicia and Athena to get some fresh air. Slip down the backstage stairs so Joe won't see you. We don't want Joe to know you've been drinking."

"Ha! That's a good one. Who do you think bought me the first two drinks? Slimy Joe, that's who. He's trying to get me to sleep with him, the bastard. He promised me top billing in exchange for a little romp now and then."

"That will never happen," Aurelia said. "I'll see to that, believe me, I will."

“You two take her for a walk and get her sober. Walk around the parking lot with her. And watch out for the creeps and weirdos hanging around out there.”

* * * * *

After the three left, Aurelia pulled her chair closer to Mindy’s makeup table and lit a cigarette. “Mindy, I gotta talk to you.”

“About what? A man?”

“Yeah, about a man.”

“Aurelia, you never talk about anything else, except maybe money.”

“I need some advice,” Aurelia said.

“You? You need advice? The one who cracks the whip around here, *Miss Top-Billing* wants my advice?” Aurelia asked Mindy her opinion of the rich-looking guy at the bar. Mindy had a natural ability to decipher men. Mindy had an instinct for picking out the weirdos and creeps. Somehow Mindy always knew the safe guys to date. Aurelia always picked losers. “You know men,” Aurelia said. “You see through them. I can’t.”

Mindy picked up her newspaper and said, “Start talking. I’ll be listening while I read.” Aurelia told Mindy about the guy who’d been in the same seat at the bar, several nights in a row. “He stays for all three shows. Four nights now, he’s been sitting out there.”

“Must have some money, if he can pay the cover charge,” Mindy said. She kept on reading the newspaper. “Are you listening to me, Mindy?”

“Sure, but I’m reading, too. Get on with your story.”

“He smiled and searched my face; like he was memorizing me with his eyes.” Aurelia remembered the glistening of perspiration that shone on his upper lip. “I think I made him sweat.”

“Did you talk to the guy?” Mindy turned the pages of her paper and shuffled them into a folded half page. “Once. He told me his name was Jared. He asked me questions.”

“What kind of questions?”

“About my work and where I was from,” Aurelia said. “He was the shy type, I guess, because he didn’t talk much.”

“And then what? Tell me everything, Kiddo,” Mindy kept reading while Aurelia talked. Aurelia remembered the intensity of his gaze. He had watched her with his dark eyes. “He asked if I lived alone. I didn’t give him an answer. I was suspicious and I wondered about the why behind it so I said, ‘*Why? You planning on following me home to rape me?*’” Mindy lowered her newspaper and looked at Aurelia. “What did he say?”

He said, ‘*I wouldn’t do that! I’m not like that. I could never—I just think you’re beautiful. Is it all right if I say that to you?*’” Mindy kept staring at Aurelia. “He was almost apologetic, like he’s sorry he gave that impression.” Aurelia tapped Mindy’s arm with her purple lacquered nails. Are you hearing what I’m telling you?”

“Sure. He sounds like a sweet young guy. Sweet and lonely. He might even be a virgin. What did you say to him about a date?”

“I told him I’d talk it over with Joe to see if I could arrange for a night.”

“Good luck with that,” Mindy said. “Joe isn’t gonna let that happen.”

“Yeah, I know. Well I might just call in sick.”

“Is any man, no matter how sweet, rich and virgin, or whatever, worth the two hundred bucks Joe will dock your pay?”

“I’ll have to get back to you later on that one.” Aurelia snubbed out her cigarette. Mindy turned a page in the newspaper and flattened it against her long legs stretched out in front of her; her ankles resting on the makeup counter. “They found a second one,” she said. Her voice was a flat monotone. “A second what?” Aurelia asked.

“Another body,” Mindy answered and ran her finger down a column in the paper.

“Is that the *Anchorage Daily News*? Aurelia asked.

“What did you think it was, the *Wall Street Journal*? Of course it’s the local paper. What else would Joe have lying around this place to read—besides *Hustler* and *Playboy*?”

“So, what’s this about another body?” Athena came into the dressing room with Connie and Alicia. Alicia crowded close to Mindy and tried to read over her shoulder.

“Let her read it aloud, for all of us,” Connie snapped.

Mindy re-folded the paper with the front page on top and began to read:

June 7, 1987: SECOND TORSO FOUND IN INLET MUD

Local authorities report the finding of another headless torso in the mudflats near Point Woronzof. A local resident and his two young sons discovered the body at noon today, while they searched the shoreline for fishnet floats. The torso was found half-buried in the sediments of Cook Inlet about twenty yards from shore. Local fire and rescue personnel retrieved the remains of a female.. The body was missing the head and both legs. Authorities told the Daily News staff that immediate attempts will be made to identify the young woman. Identification will probably necessitate forensic analysis, as the condition of the body's hands eliminated identification through fingerprints. It would be months before a positive identification could be made, if ever. The office of the coroner reported they could not estimate how long the body had been in the water. The cold temperatures of the Inlet tend to preserve the bodies found in its waters. Bacterial action is rarely present and it is difficult, if not impossible to pinpoint a time of death. The same was true for another torso recovered in May. It was assumed by local police officials, that this body, found less than a mile from where the first torso was discovered by a shore-bird-watching party in early May, was possibly a victim of the same perpetrator. Authorities did not release details other than both bodies had been mutilated in exactly the same fashion. Police and federal agents reported they had reviewed all missing persons cases filed over the past two years after the discovery of the first torso in May and told the Daily News staff there were only six such reports in that period, and five of these were males."

"Why can't they use fingerprints to find out who it was," Connie said.

"You didn't listen to what Mindy just read," Aurelia said. "The hands were mutilated or something. Maybe the fingers were cut off."

"Wow, that gives me the creeps," Connie whispered. "What kind of weirdo would do that—cut off a person's head and fingers and all?"

"Any one of a number of weirdos that are out there," Aurelia said.

“Well, as for me I try to stay far away from the kooks and nut-types,” Athena said. “That’s why I don’t date men.”

“Aside from the fact that you’re a dyke, you mean?” Connie smirked at Athena.

“So, I’m a lesbian, that’s my business, but I’m still smart enough to keep away from dangerous weirdo types. I won’t even have a drink with any man I think is suspect. I think I’m smart enough to watch out for myself and you all should be as smart.”

“Do you think many of these dangerous weirdos come to watch us dance?” Alicia went over and huddled on the chaise-lounge with Athena. Could they be killers of girls like us, these weirdos?”

“*Querida*, most of the guys who come in here to watch you dance fit the bill. Anyone who watches that phony bullfighter routine with that Gawd-awful pink cape you twirl around has to be weird, if you want my opinion,” Aurelia couldn’t resist getting a dig in. She turned away feigning disinterest while the other girls chattered on about the bodies in the mud flats of Cook Inlet. Mindy took a pair of scissors from her makeup box and cut out the article from the *Daily News*. She pinned it on the cork bulletin board for notices and schedules.

“Athena is right,” Mindy said. “There are a lot of men who come in here who scare the beejeezus out of me. And I hope all of you have the sense to listen to your instincts or whatever it is that warns you about the creeps and the weirdos and the psychos that get their jollies while they watch us strip.”

“They might be killers after us!” Alicia’s voice had an edge of hysteria. “I thought this was a safe city. Now, I am not sure of this: girls killed, heads cut off, it could be one of us next time!”

“This talk of bodies on the mud flats puts me on full alert.” Athena said. “Look out for the nut cases. We’re smart enough to spot them if we try. We could watch out for each other. Check out the men you date beforehand and do so as a group.”

“Are you saying I have to check with you before I go out on a date?” Connie asked, “I’m not a little girl and I can take care of myself, Athena. I’m smart as any of you and can recognize a nut case for myself.”

Aurelia noticed Connie's defiance and told herself to be cautious with this one.

"Sure you can, Connie," Mindy said. "I'm sure those dead girls thought the same thing at one time."

"Screw you, Mindy," Connie said.

"Listen, Connie, it couldn't hurt if we tried to care about each other's safety. Somebody is out there cutting off women's heads. Don't you get it, Connie? The types who kill young women can be the same types who frequent strip joints! Like Mindy says, one out of five that comes in here is a nut case." Athena said.

"I will not be a member of your little Girl Scout troop here, Athena."

"No, Connie, you're not the type. A loner like you probably ignores the old saw about safety in numbers." Mindy stepped in between the two girls to quell a potential catfight. "Do it your way, Connie, but whatever you do, keep your eyes open."

Alicia started pacing the length of the dressing room, snapping her fingers nervously.

"*Querida*, can you knock off that finger snapping? My nerves are shot after hearing what Mindy read us."

I don't want to do a show now, after all this talk about bodies, murder and creeps and weirdos," Alicia said.

"Do not worry, *querida*," Connie's words dripped sarcasm. "All of the weirdos will be following after me when I leave the stage. There will be none out there left to murder dear little you."

Mindy shouted, "All right, goddammit, this is serious stuff. I've warned you two." The dressing room turned as silent as a mausoleum for the next ten minutes.

"Sorry," Alicia said meekly. *Lo siento mucho*, I am so sorry!"

"Well that's a first for you, Alicia," Athena said. Aurelia sat at her makeup table and painted on her stage face. Thoughts of the headless torso on the mud flats of Cook Inlet rested in the back her mind. She knew she didn't share the fear the others felt. Pete, the stage manager, stuck his head in through the curtain door to the dressing room. "We got a full house, let's give these horny Anchorage boys a real show tonight."

“Spot any real weird types?” Mindy asked.

Pete said, “There’s that big red-headed dude sitting at the curve of the bar. Heard tell he’s not quite right in the head. Poor sonofabitch fell off scaffolding a couple of years ago, and they say he’s only got one oar in the water now. He don’t talk to anybody and I heard he has a habit of punching his fist through the walls ever so often, I’d keep shy of him, girls.”

“Any others?” Athena asked. She was not totally convinced Pete could spot a true weirdo. Those he considered strange looking, he labeled dangerous. Athena wasn’t ignorant of the fact that most real psychos look and seem the most harmless; at least that’s what she had read. The midnight show went off without a hitch. The set ended when the star-billed dancer, Aurelia, finished the routine Joe Bucherri said knocked *the young ones dead and brought the old dead ones back to life*. The two A.M. show was just as successful. Most of the crowd had paid a second minimal cover to stay for the last performance. Pipeline workers and construction men made up the late show crowd. They watched Aurelia make love to her brass pole; her act closed the strip bar for the night.

* * * * *

“You need a ride back to the apartment complex, Connie?” Aurelia turned off the lights at her makeup station. She was alone with Connie; the others had left. “I can take a cab,” Connie answered.

“That’s ridiculous. Why waste the money when I’m going right past your apartment? Besides, it’s Friday night, you’ll have a hell of a time getting a taxi at this hour.”

“Why are you offering the ride? You don’t like me and I don’t like you.”

“I’m offering the ride because of what Mindy read us about the murdered girls,” Aurelia explained. “You can ride with me. You don’t have to talk to me. I’m probably a lot safer to ride with than some independent cabbie who might pick you up at three in the morning.”

“Yeah, probably. Okay. Let’s go.”

Aurelia smiled and let Connie walk ahead of her to the red pickup truck waiting at the far end of the dimly lighted parking lot. She

scanned the area and noted there was no one in sight, no lingering stage door Johnnies or horny airman from the base. That was good.

In the pickup, Aurelia removed her windbreaker from the passenger seat and tossed it over the back. She waited for Connie to buckle in before she checked the contents of her purse. Everything was there. "Do you want to talk or not, Connie? It's up to you. We can try to be nice to each other, you know."

"Yeah, well let me tell you something, sweetie. I don't trust *nice* in a woman or a man. Nice can be as weird as they come, sometimes."

"Since when did *nice* hurt anyone?"

"Remember that *nice* Norman Bates in the movie Psycho? He seemed so sweet—nice and normal but he was a real sicko, a woman hater. He killed Janet Leigh. He couldn't have sex with women so he killed them."

"Sounds gay to me," Aurelia said.

"Oh, yeah," Connie giggled.

"Well, I can stop being nice if you think that would help any."

"When did you start?" Connie giggled again. Aurelia tried to relax and faked a return giggle. "Hey, want to stop for a burger and fries or something?" Aurelia asked. "I have to eat something. I think my blood sugar is low."

"Why not, we're getting along so far. I could use some hot tea. What's with the low blood sugar remark?"

"I'm a diabetic. I try to keep it quiet and Mindy is the only one who knows I take insulin. Well, now *you* know, but I would appreciate it if you didn't let the others know. Joe Bucherri might think being diabetic could cause him some liability problems at the club. Like tonight, I think I took too much insulin between shows. Low blood sugar is the result if I overdose accidentally."

"Wow. That is some news. Trust me, my lips are sealed."

Aurelia looked at Connie and saw that her fellow stripper couldn't wait to tell Joe what she had just learned. "Of course I trust you. Now let's go get that hot tea and some food." Aurelia turned the wheel of her pickup toward Spenard Road and headed for the all-night restaurant at the International Airport.

* * * * *

Saturday night in the dressing room was different. It was noticeably quieter. Alicia and Aurelia weren't exchanging verbal or physical blows. They sat together whispering in Spanish. Athena was unusually silent; busy gluing sequins all over her ample chest area. Connie hadn't come in yet. Mindy was reading the *Anchorage Daily News*. "Listen to this, girls," Mindy read from the paper:

MUD FLATS VICTIM MAY BE MISSING WOMAN

Police announced today that they had a probable tentative identification of the mutilated torso discovered in the tidal flats of Cook Inlet this week. The only female missing person reported in the past seven months, was a Seattle woman who has not been seen or heard from since September of last year. Police say a local bar owner gave information about her disappearance after he read of the discovery of the torso in the Daily News. One of his exotic dancers failed to finish out her contract with his club last year. He said a fight between two dancers at his club may have been the reason the Seattle based entertainer left. 'I never gave it much thought when she left. I was upset because I had to replace her. She still had two weeks pay coming and she never sent for it either.' Club owner Frank Fisher is quoted as saying. Authorities in the coroner's office have contacted the missing woman's mother in Seattle to obtain more personal information on the missing woman. The woman's name has not been released at this time pending positive identification.

"I'd never work for that slime-cake, Frankie," Athena said. "I know about his operation from a girl who quit working for him after just two weeks."

"The story isn't about Frankie, Athena," Mindy said. "You missed the point. She was one of us. That's the point of the story for us. She was a stripper. Someone's targeting strippers."

Mindy scissored out the article and pinned it on the bulletin board next to the first story.

"I worked for him once," Aurelia said. "It wasn't a bad club, but some of the girls were real prima donnas. I left as soon as I could."

"Aurelia, it is nine-fifteen and Connie has not yet come in," Alicia lisped. "What if Connie—?"

“Connie probably had trouble getting a taxi,” Aurelia cut in quickly, her voice sharp with irritation.

“But what if she has been—I mean she is not here—she could be murdered!”

Mindy walked barefooted and open-robed back to her black lacquered chair and sat down at her makeup area. “Thanks for pointing that out, Alicia,” Mindy said. “You think Connie been hacked up by the local weirdo who’s killing exotic dancers? Bullshit.”

“I plan to give her until nine-thirty to get here. Finding a taxi at this hour on a Saturday night is a problem,” Aurelia said.

“Then why doesn’t the stupid bitch rent a car like I did? Is she a penny-pincher or what?” Athena asked. “I can get her a good deal with a friend of mine who works at Hertz out at the airport. He comes in here quite a bit.”

“You take that up with her when she comes in,” Aurelia said. Suddenly there was a silence in the dressing room.

A silence totally unusual and unexpected; a silence edged with fear and tainted with apprehension. Between shows, Mindy checked with Pete to see if Connie had phoned. She hadn’t. Connie had always been pretty much a loner. She even drank alone. *A bad sign*, Mindy called *Frankie’s Bar and Show Grill* on the chance that Connie ran with some of the other strippers in town, but none of the girls at Frankie’s knew her. Mindy asked the others to help her find Connie. Mindy called up the stairs, “Let’s go check on Connie. Come on, we’ve got just a little over an hour.” Athena and Alicia clattered down the stairs to the backstage. “Aurelia says she’ll wait here. She said we should take her truck because she has that mobile phone unit she paid so frigging much to get installed.” Athena dangled the truck keys and Mindy grabbed them. “Aurelia said if we find Connie we are to call her from the phone in the truck. If Connie shows up drunk, Aurelia will call us to come back.”

“*Dios mío*, she’s probably drunk on her ass somewhere. Try the Jade Room, she likes that place,” Alicia said. Mindy herded the two girls to Aurelia’s double-cab red truck. Mindy drove and that suited Athena. Mindy knew her way around town better than she did. Mindy took Minnesota down to L Street and drove down the hill past the

Lagoon toward downtown. The moon seemed to follow them; shining low, traveling alongside the moving truck with a full brilliance. The low tide of the inlet was just turning. The vast mud flats shimmered in the moonlight. In some locations, water-shaped jumbles of mud lay like huge shards of silver pieces of a giant broken mirror. The inlet tugged at the lower edge of the city of Anchorage.

"Jeez Louise," Athena whistled through her teeth at the sight of a tide flats spreading like molten silver as it rushed up the Inlet. "That is *so* beautiful."

"You mean the ocean?" Alicia bent to try a view from her seat in the back of the truck cab. "If you see one ocean you see them all."

"Look, Alicia, I'm from Iowa. We don't have oceans in corn country, so this Cook Inlet is beautiful to me."

Alicia tried to make peace, "Okay, Athena, okay. It is *pretty*, okay?"

"Pretty and deadly," Mindy said.

"What do you mean, deadly, Mindy?" Athena asked.

"Haven't you heard any of the urban legends about the Inlet? People think they can walk out there and think it will be like strolling on the beach somewhere."

"Ooh, that might be fun." Alicia giggled, "You'd end up dead," Mindy said. "Every year a tourist, or a newly arrived sourdough-wannabe, walks out there and gets caught. All that glistening silver is mud—silt mud. Anything living or dead that goes into that mud sinks and disappears—if not forever, for a hell of a long while. It's not the water that's the big problem, it's the mud below that gets you."

"Yuck," Alicia giggled. "I hate mud. I can't even have a mud wrap at the spa."

All three girls looked out toward the inlet when Mindy stopped at the light at the bottom of the hill. "That's the reason he put them there." Athena said quietly.

"Put what? Where?" Alicia leaned forward, the better to hear.

"The bodies."

"*Idiota! Las mujeres muertas!*" Alicia whined. "Stop talking about those poor dead girls, you *loca!* *Dios mío*, I do not want to die in this city."

“Nobody’s going to kill you, asshole. You’re with us. You’re safe. Maybe Connie’s not.”

“Well, we’ve got forty-five more minutes left to find out,” Mindy said. She turned the car onto I street and then turned right at the corner on Seventh Avenue to park at the side of the Jade room. “Wait here,” she said.

* * * * *

Mindy saw they had thirty more minutes to check one or two of Connie’s favorite bars before heading to the apartment complex where she stayed.

“The bartender and the Jade Room said Connie had been in for a drink with some guy and then left around four-thirty in the morning. That’s all he could give me.”

“Let’s try the Bonfire Lounge and Murphy’s,” Athena said. “She’s talked to me about both places.” No one at either bar recalled seeing Connie, although some of the patrons and both bartenders said they knew her well enough to remember if she’d stopped for a drink there last night. At the apartment complex, the manager said, “She ain’t been around since Friday morning.” He switched his cigar to the other side of his mouth with his tongue and went on, “She ain’t sick or nothin’ is she? She’s a nice kid. Drinks a bit, but, then don’t we all. But drunk or sober she ain’t been here since Friday morning.”

“That ends it then, doesn’t it?” Athena said. “I mean, we don’t have a clue.”

“It looks that way,” Mindy said. “Let’s get back to the club and give Joe the bad news. We’ll have to rearrange our schedules for the shows tonight.”

“From now on I only date cute gentlemen,” Alicia said,

“Remember Ted Bundy? He was cute, polite and a gentleman.”

“Stop it Mindy,” Athena said. “You are scaring the hell out of me. Ted Bundy was a psycho—an ‘A’ class psycho. Do you think there are any like him in Anchorage?”

“Can there be?” Alicia said.

“I don’t know,” Mindy said.

* * * * *

The shows at the *Pink Pussy Cat* continued through the rest of August. Joe didn't hire a replacement for Connie. When she never returned, Joe divvied up her salary among the remaining strippers and the shows went on. Backstage, the girls refrained from talking about Connie and her disappearance. They avoided the men and kept apart from the customers, which cut into their tips and made Joe angry, but they felt safer.

* * * * *

September came and with it another article in the *Anchorage Daily News*:

September 4, Anchorage: THIRD BODY FOUND ON FLATS

A third headless torso was found on the mud flats at low tide near Potter Marsh Tidal Park this weekend. Labor Day partygoers sighted the body just before sunset on Monday. State Troopers and local police retrieved the body after dark with the aid of field lights.

'This torso has not been in the water as long as the first two discovered in approximately the same area this past summer.' Police authorities told the Daily News. "We have more than a fair chance of identifying this body. There are some physical markings we feel we can trace." Chief Wilson said. Local residents are pushing the police to further their investigations, and Mayor Barton has urged the police and other civil authorities to speed up the process of identification and the pursuit of the perpetrator of such gruesome crimes. One Point Woronzof resident is quoted as saying, "What we have here is a serial killer. A real psycho type. We've never had this sort of thing in Anchorage before.' Police Chief Wilson declined comment on the woman's supposition.

Mindy clipped out the article and pinned it next to the others on the cork board. The girls read the articles in silence, and each reacted in a different way. Athena railed against men and said she had a permit to carry the .45-caliber handgun she proudly pulled from her fanny-pack. Alicia started snapping her nervous fingers and Aurelia feigned disinterest. Mindy reiterated the need for constant awareness. Alicia

was never more than ten feet away from any of the other girls and dogged Aurelia. Alicia chattered in Spanish. She told Aurelia she was being followed. "She's a real nut case about being murdered," Aurelia remarked to Athena. "But at least the Spanish cow is safe living with you. Nobody can get to her to do any butchering, unless it's one of us. Sometimes, I am *really* tempted!"

Athena said. "I'm just about ready to kill her. She snores like a two cylinder tractor. I never get any sleep since she moved into my place."

"Try ear plugs," Aurelia said and beamed a smile at Athena.

* * * * *

The Saturday after the Labor Day holiday, the house was packed. It was the largest crowd Joe Bucherri had ever hosted at the *Pink Pussy Cat*. The girls worked the crowd as a unit and the money rolled in. After the last show, the dressing room cleared earlier than usual. Alicia and Athena were gone before Mindy had her costumes on the rack. On the way out of the club Mindy glanced at the back booth to see Aurelia was still there.

"Keep your guard up, kid" Mindy called to Aurelia. "Will do," Aurelia shouted back and lifted her glass in a salute."Aurelia didn't finish the drink the stage manager had bought for her. She glanced around the nearly empty bar. She pushed her arms into her silver-grey windbreaker and scooped up the oversized handbag she always carried and slung it over her head and under on arm to secure it. The temperature outside the club was surprisingly mild. It was several degrees warmer than two weeks before, when she had spent at least three of the early morning hours in the open air. There was a warm wind sliding down the Chugach Mountains at the edge of the Anchorage Bowl. The warmth flowed down into the city and gave a summer night feel to the darkness. When Aurelia turned toward the space at the rear of the club where she had parked her car, she noticed a difference in the illumination. It was darker than usual. She saw the overhead halogen light was not working. She stopped in the down light from the exit door lamp, and pulled out her key and the can of mace from her bag. Aurelia hurried to the car, bent and inserted the key. She

heard the scrape of footsteps on the paved parking lot, but before she could turn and aim the can of mace, the heavy wool blanket dropped over her head and shoulders. Something thudded against the side of her skull. Purple and green lights flashed behind her eyes. Bright lights—fireworks without sound—lights that brought searing pain and oblivion.

* * * * *

Aurelia's hands were tied together in front of her. A thick section of nylon boat rope looped down through the twists binding her hands and lower arms, then twisted down to her ankles, which were bound together in the same manner. She saw the strips of yellow light shining through the cracks of shuttered windows. Aurelia tried to make out her surroundings. Her vision blurred. She had no idea how long she'd been unconscious; trussed up and lying on a bed. After something smashed into the side of her head she had no time reference. *That had been early Saturday morning, hadn't it?* She couldn't remember. A throbbing, fog of a headache clouded her thoughts. Her muscles ached as if she'd danced her routine ten times in a row. Aurelia rolled on her side to ease the pain in her back and hips. Her eyes wouldn't focus properly. The dim streaks of light striped the room in a zebra pattern. The smell of the sea filled the room. Aurelia turned her head at an angle and saw someone lying beside her. It was the nice young man from the club; the one who had been so polite. She remembered his name: Jared. She held her breath and listened. She heard his heavy breathing. He was sleeping. Aurelia prodded the young man with the toes of her bound feet. He sat up with a jerk, startled and seemed to be orienting to his surroundings.

"Hello, Aurelia," he said.

"What the hell is going on, Jared? Did they bring you here, too?"

"Oh, no. There isn't anyone else. I brought you here by myself."

"What do you think you're doing? When I get out of these ropes, I'm going to cut your heart out. I thought you were a nice guy, but you're just another bastard!"

"Don't be mad at me, Aurelia. I love you. I just wanted you to be with me. I wanted the others to be with me forever, too. But none of

them stayed very long. You'll stay, won't you Aurelia? I promise I won't hurt you."

"Well, it's a little late for that you idiot! My head feels like you clobbered me with a pickax."

"I'm so sorry, Aurelia."

"Why should I believe that? What *did* you hit me with?"

"My fist. I didn't want to hit you but I knew you wouldn't want to come out here with me, voluntarily."

"You can bet on that. If I'd known all that polite gentleman shit was a cover, I would have taken care of you long ago."

"I've fixed this place up so you can be comfortable." Jared said.

"Where is this place?"

"It's my step-father's hunting cabin. It's on the other side of the inlet from Anchorage. It's pretty isolated. We can be alone. Nobody comes down this road anymore since my step-father blocked the access road and posted the land. It's near the water. You can smell the flats when the tide goes out. Like now."

"I figured that much out by the stink of things."

"I needed to have you here with me, Aurelia."

"Now that you've got me here, what do you intend to do with me? I suppose you plan to rape me and make me your sex slave. Am I right on that?"

"Oh, no, Miss Aurelia. I wouldn't do that. I couldn't. My mother raised me to honor and respect women. I could never defile a woman." Jared looked away. "I've never been with a girl that way."

"How many women have asked you to 'defile' them? You pathetic little creep."

"Don't call me names. Don't make fun of me, Aurelia. I don't like it when women make fun of me. Some of the others did. I didn't like them after that. I hate it when women laugh at me." Aurelia saw the young man's dark eyes narrow and his lips curl away from his clenched teeth. *Nuttier than a fruitcake. This nutso might kill me if I piss him off. Gotta be careful what I say.* "I'm not laughing at you, Jared. I'm not making fun of you either. I'm sorry. I was just a little pissed at you—at first—now, well, now I'm beginning to see things differently. I won't run away. I can't even if I wanted to—which I

don't. Could you untie my legs and feet, please? I need to stand up for a while." The young man knelt beside Aurelia. He touched her bound hands and gently moved his fingers up to her cheek. "You're so beautiful, Aurelia. You promise me you won't try to get away. Promise you won't leave me. I just want to be with you. I just want to be able to look at you and watch you."

"I promise you. Please let me stand up. My legs hurt."

"I don't want to hurt you, believe me. I don't. But you've got to give me your word that you won't try to get away."

"I give it, Jared. Please. Untie my legs."

* * * * *

Thirty minutes later, Aurelia sat in a comfortable armchair. Jared untied her feet and legs but kept her wrists bound. He allowed a space of ten inches between her wrists so she could move her hands to hold a glass of water or open her handbag. The first time she reached for her handbag, Jared cautioned her. "I took your truck keys, the mace can and your buck knife out of your bag. I put I just couldn't let you have them."

"Did you take my little black medical kit? The one with the zipper?" Aurelia control her panic. "Jared, I'm a diabetic. I have to give myself shots once or twice a day."

"I figured that. I put it on top of the cabinet outside the bathroom door. I'll bring it to you when you need it."

"That's kind of you, Jared."

"My mother says I'm kind."

"You like your mother, Don't you, Danny?" Aurelia watched the young man's face to read his reactions. "She's been very close to you, hasn't she?"

Jared's answer was a soft, mumbled, "Yes." Aurelia saw his eyes tear up and she also saw the twitch of his jaw muscles as Jared fought to hide something from her. *I've been kidnapped by a mama's boy with extreme sexual inhibitions, an Oedipal complex and Gawd knows what other hangups.*

Aurelia looked around from the confines of her chair. "Could I stand up and get a better look at the place?" Jared helped her to stand.

Aurelia used lowered her eyes and then looked up suddenly with widened eyes; the same stage trick she used in her routines. “Why did you bring me out here, Jared?”

“I already told you. I want you to be with me.”

“Don’t you know my friends at the club will miss me and wonder where I am? They’ll worry about me.” Aurelia could see the effect these words had on her abductor.

“I can’t untie you—not yet. Please don’t ask me.”

“Do you trust me, Danny?”

“I love you.”

“If you love someone, you trust them.

“I want to trust you.”

“If you untie my hands, I promise to stay with you. Jared, I need to go to the bathroom to take my insulin shot. I can’t do that with my hands tied this way.”

“I’ll bring your medicine kit and untie your arms. I’ll wait outside the bathroom door.”

Aurelia locked the door and secured the latch chain. She unzipped her medicine kit and pulled out a syringe and two bottles. One contained clear insulin; the other was a lemon-yellow-coloured liquid. She selected the largest hypodermic syringe in her kit and shoved the short, sharp needle through the rubber cap and pulled the plunger on the syringe until the cylinder was half full of insulin. She added the yellow sodium pentothal until the hypodermic was full. Aurelia shook the syringe to mix the liquids. She used a full bottle of insulin; enough to kill a person if taken in one injection. The second drug doubled her chances of success. Aurelia placed the syringe on a folded towel next to the door. She pulled the half roll of toilet paper from a rack and dropped it into the chemical toilet before she moved to the thick door and called to Jared. “I just dropped the TP by accident. Could you hand me another roll if I crack open the door?”

“I’ll get it.”

Aurelia prepared for what was to come. Jared rapped on the door and Aurelia opened it as far as the short latch chain allowed. She picked up the syringe and waited for Jared to offer the tissue. She saw his shirt-sleeved arm push through. His hand held out the roll. In one

quick motion, she threw her weight against the door to hold his arm fast and jabbed the needle into the man's forearm and shoved the plunger on the syringe.

Jared gave out a yelp and tried to withdraw his arm. Aurelia braced her legs against the sink and leaned against the door. Danny's arm was held in this improvised vise of the door and its frame while Aurelia emptied the syringe. When she could no longer keep up the pressure on the door, Jared pulled his arm back so fast the syringe was jerked from Aurelia's hand. She slammed the door and locked it with the sliding bolt. It would only be a matter of a few more seconds before she heard the thud when Jared fell unconscious to the floor. She heard him mumble her name. She heard the crunch of wood when he fell against the hallway chest. Aurelia counted to one hundred before she opened the door. She was in no hurry now. She had enough experience using the drugs she injected into the man. She knew just what the effects were and the number of minutes before the victim stopped breathing. She had done it four times before and knew what to expect.

Jared lay sprawled on the floor. He was crumpled into a limp heap. His legs were twisted into an unnatural position and one arm was pinned beneath his body. Aurelia turned him on his back and dragged him by his arms into the main room of the cabin. She kicked him with the toe of her boot and he groaned. She knelt down and whispered into his ear.

"I know you can hear me, Jared. That's one of the effects of the drug that took you down. You can hear me but you can't move or answer back. I like that. So listen to what I have to say. I said you could trust me. You see, I haven't left you. I don't intend to leave you for a while. I will stay here until they come and find me. I'll stay with you and when they come, I will tell them how you planned to kill me and throw my headless torso into the Inlet mud. Oh, I know you would never have done that, Jared, but the Troopers won't know that and you won't be able to tell them the truth because you'll be dead, Jared dear." Aurelia opened her medical kit and filled a second syringe with insulin. She unbuttoned his sleeve and gently rolled it up and injected a full bottle of insulin into his limp arm. "Just to make sure, Jared,"

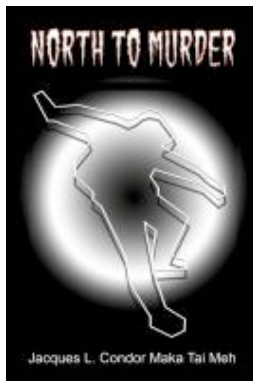
She had watched insulin work on her previous victims. The extra lethal dose of insulin would prevent the needed glucose from reaching the brain. The brain would die bit by bit. The body would react with seizures and slip into a fatal coma. Aurelia had no desire to watch the process again and she found her keys and went out to the trunk. She unlocked the metal storage box behind the cab and pulled on the thick rubber gloves she kept there. One article at a time she carried to the storage room just inside the cabin's back door. She set the bolt cutters, the hand axe, butcher knives, meat saw and hacksaw and packet of rubber gloves on the storage shelves next to the coils of nylon boat rope. None of her finger prints could ever be found on any of the tools she used to prepare her victims for the Inlet mud. Now the Troopers would see they were Jared's tools. Aurelia knew the Troopers would come and when they came she would act hysterical. She decided to rip her sweater and blouse and tore the strap off her bra for good measure. She would tell the Troopers the dead man was the serial killer who had murdered all those girls whose bodies were turning up in the mud below the waters of Cook Inlet. It would soon be over. She had watched Connie die slowly this way. The other strippers all died faster. The first one, last May, didn't need extra insulin. The bitch from Frankie's Club, who had insulted her and slapped her around in the dressing room, was the easy kill. She didn't fight back like the first one. The murder of the first one had taught her to be both devious and quick with injection of the knock-out drugs. Afterward, it was cold hard work getting them ready for the Inlet. Aurelia studied the dead man. She wouldn't have to do all that nasty butchering this time. She went outside, turned on the truck engine and let it run a few minutes. She picked up the mobile phone unit and dialed the office number of Joe Bucherri. She heard Joe pick up and she began sobbing and screaming.

* * * * *

Now all she had to do was sit and wait. She prepared and rehearsed a story of how Jared had tormented her and bragged about the killings and terrified her with details only the killer would know. They would believe her. After all, she had been abducted and held

captive by a crazy man. Aurelia knew the heavy doses of insulin mimicked a brain aneurism. Insulin was a natural body compound always found in the bloodstream. Sodium pentothal wouldn't show up in any autopsy because it rarely left a residual trace.

Aurelia realized she was hungry. She hadn't eaten since the night of her abduction. She stepped across the body and strolled into the kitchen area. *I wonder what goodies that idiot put in the fridge.* She examined the contents: orange juice, two slices of saran-wrapped pizza, a bag of red apples, and a carton of cottage cheese. The pizza was tempting. But she had to watch her weight if she was going to keep her 'Top of the Bill' status at the *Pink Pussy Cat*. Aurelia picked up an apple and the carton of cottage cheese.



Alaska can be a deadly place. The real dangers for Alaskan residents are other residents. Murder seems to be the solution to many problems. A motive can be found in all seven deadly sins and the base emotions. The most surprising thing is how many murderers are never caught. The stories in this collection are about Alaskans who kill and get away with it. The tales were created from both fact and fiction.

North to Murder

Order the complete book from

[Booklocker.com](http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/8027.html?s=pdf)

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/8027.html?s=pdf>

**or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.**