



# 1ST IMPRESSIONS

*A Cassidy James Mystery*

Kate  
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by

Kate Calloway



2010

This is a work of fiction and all of the characters involved in the story are imaginary. Any resemblance to actual events, places or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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## About the Author

Kate Calloway was born in 1957. She has published several novels including *First Impressions*, *Second Fiddle*, *Third Degree*, *Fourth Down*, *Fifth Wheel*, *Sixth Sense*, *Seventh Heaven* and *Eighth Day*, all in the Cassidy James Mystery Series. Her short stories appear in *Lady Be Good*, *Dancing in the Dark*, and *The Very Thought of You*. When she isn't writing fiction, she enjoys barbecuing, wine-tasting, boating, song-writing, and spending time with Carol. They split their time between Southern California and the Pacific Northwest, setting for the Cassidy James novels.

*For Carol,  
the only inspiration I need.*

## **Acknowledgments**

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I'd also like to thank my family, whose unconditional love and support have always given me the space to grow and flourish.



# Chapter One

The problem with dumping a body in Rainbow Lake is that it almost immediately rises to the top, even when weighted down with rope and cement. The blame lies with the catfish and giant sturgeon that feed along the weedy bottom, scavenging for food. Together they make very short work of any flesh drifting their way, and it isn't long before what's left bounces to the surface, presenting a grotesque discovery for some unlucky boater.

Walter Trinidad hadn't been under more than forty-eight hours before our mail carrier, Buddy Drake, thumped over him on his morning route. Thinking he'd hit a floating log, Buddy, an adept boatsman, wheeled his dinged-up Bow Rider around so he could tie the log to his stern and later drag it up the bank of his lake-front home. A shrewd scavenger, Buddy had not needed to buy firewood or lumber for many years,

living quite comfortably off what treasures the lake and land provided.

When he reached into the water to grasp his latest treasure, Buddy instead got a fistful of Walter Trinidad's thick red beard which the fish had left unscathed. It was that beard that helped identify Walter Trinidad, since the rest of his face was largely unrecognizable.

News probably travels faster in Cedar Hills, Oregon, than anywhere on earth. By the time I had showered, dried my hair and slipped into a pair of jeans and tennies for my morning walk, Buddy Drake had already towed Walter Trinidad's body to the county dock.

I hopped into my boat, a sky blue, open-bow Sea Swirl, and motored the half mile to Cedar Hills Marina where I kept a slip. At full speed, the trip took only a few minutes, but often I took it slower, enjoying the smells, sights and sounds of life on the lake. That morning as I putt-putted along, I noticed the throng of townspeople gathered around the county dock, but I didn't stop, thinking vaguely that perhaps someone had bought a new boat that the locals were ogling. Tommy Green met me as I pulled up to the gas dock at the marina.

"Morning, Miz James. Didja hear the news?" he asked, an impish grin on his young, sunburned face.

"Hi, Tommy. What news is that?"

"Heck, ya passed right by it. Ol' Buddy Drake run over that Walter Trinidad 'bout an hour back."

"Buddy Drake ran him over? Is he all right?" I asked.

"You want I should fill this up for you?" Tommy indicated the gas pump. I nodded and he continued. "Nah, he was already kilt. Fish got him purdy bad too. Weren't much left of him from what I could see. I went right over as soon as I heard, but Mr. Townsend told me to come back and finish washin' off these ramps. Soon as I'm through, though, I'm headin' right back over. You wanna go?"

The prospect of seeing a partially eaten Walter Trinidad did not appeal to me in the least. In fact, I'd hardly liked looking at the man alive. Rude and overbearing, Walter Trinidad had made it big in California real estate, and bought himself a luxurious lakefront estate in Oregon, where he spent two months each summer lording it over the less fortunate townfolk. I doubted that his demise would be mourned by many.

"I think I'll pass, Tommy. But thanks for the invitation. I trust you'll fill me in on all the sordid details later."

"Be happy to do it, Miz James. My pleasure."

As usual, it was hard to know if Tommy was serious or just had a warped sense of humor. His elfin features always seemed to be on the verge of laughter. His accent, though, was straight out of *Deliverance*. Half the time he sounded like a backwoods hillbilly, but then he'd come up with a startling insight that made me think Tommy was a heck of a lot brighter than he let on. Where he'd gotten his accent was a mystery. In fact, he wasn't the only Cedar Hills local who talked in a stylized twang that hinted of Texas, Alabama and the Ozarks all rolled into one. After three years of mixing with the locals, I still marveled at the rich and complex dialect that seemed to permeate the town. Ten miles south, in Kings Harbor, people didn't appear to have any accent at all. But here in Cedar Hills, a town of not quite nine hundred, at least half the citizenry spoke in what I privately referred to as the Cedar Hills drawl.

I left my boat in Tommy's capable hands, hefted my trash bags into the dumpster provided for marina customers, then set off on my daily trek through the streets of Cedar Hills.

Living alone in a house accessible only by boat may seem like a hardship to some, but it's my kind of paradise. It's true, it takes longer to get groceries and take out the trash, but these minor inconveniences are just part of the charm of living on the lake. My daily jaunt through Cedar Hills provides me with

all the exercise and social life I need. I'm always happy to get back to my lake house. While no-one's idea of a mansion, its open-beam ceilings, large brick fireplace and picture windows overlooking the lake are an idyllic setting for someone like me. My cats, Gammon and Panic, are loyal and loving companions, and in the event I require some actual human interaction, I have my best friend Martha in Kings Harbor a quick phone call away.

For three years I've lived this way, healing from the loss of my lover who succumbed at last, in painful defeat, to cancer. She had been my life mate, my partner, my long-time companion. In the end, reduced to a mere skeleton of herself, she begged to go, and I too prayed to a God I had long been cursing to hasten her death. When it was over, the silence she left behind was unbearable. What was left of my life held no meaning. The money from her substantial inheritance, her life insurance, and the properties we owned together were enough to tide me over indefinitely. I had no need, or desire, to continue my teaching career. I had no taste for the incessant sunshine of Southern California, which before had always been a pleasure. It's not that my will to live was gone, just my zest for living.

It was Martha, my first roommate in college, who talked me into coming to Oregon. She had been steadily working her way up the ranks of the Kings Harbor Police Department and positively glowed with enthusiasm for life in the Pacific Northwest.

"Cass, you gotta try it," she told me long distance, after Diane died. "The air is still blue, when it isn't raining, and the people actually say hello to one another. And," she added, her husky voice full of laughter, "none of the women have that anorexic unhealthiness they've got in California."

Martha, who has always battled her weight, had detested the bikini-clad sorority types that dotted the poolside of our

dormitory at UCLA ten years earlier. I could see how Oregon would suit her.

“The one bad thing is,” she went on, “you can’t tell the dykes from the soccer moms. I mean it, Cass. Every other woman you see is dressed in jeans and a flannel. It can be confusing.”

“Must be quite a problem for you,” I teased. Martha was well-known for her amorous liaisons. “Hope you haven’t made too much of a fool of yourself. You used to brag that you could spot a lesbian a mile away.”

Martha just chuckled and as usual, our conversation left me laughing and feeling better. Several phone calls later, Martha convinced me to come up for a visit, and by the time my visit was over, I had fallen in love with the whole area, especially the nearby town of Cedar Hills. When I discovered the beautiful, natural wood house which sat perched above the lake in a clearing surrounded by cedar and fir, I knew I’d found my new home, my place for healing.

As I walked along that morning, stretching my legs, I chuckled over Martha’s continual influence in my life. Not only had she been the one to introduce me to the lesbian lifestyle twelve years earlier, but she had rescued me from the doldrums of Southern California and shortly thereafter convinced me to try a new vocation, that of private investigator.

“You’re kidding, right?” I said when she first brought it up. “Why would I want to do that?”

“Because you’re a natural, Cass. You’ve got all the right instincts. Listen, we’ve got detectives on the force who don’t have half the inclination you do for this kind of work. And the beauty of being a private investigator is you don’t have to take a bunch of crap from the higher-ups. You can take a case or leave it. You can pick and choose. You’re your own boss.”

I had to admit, that part appealed to me.

“Remember those dorm break-ins in college? You were

the one who figured out it was the Resident Advisor, when the cops all thought it was some vagrant. You've always been that way, Cass. I figured you'd either end up a cop yourself, or a criminal."

"Very funny," I said.

Martha was laughing, but I could tell she wasn't going to let it go. "Anyway, we could use a decent P.I. around here. The only one worth a damn is Jake Parcell, and he's pushing seventy. Besides, what do you have to lose? If you don't like it, you can always go back to fishing off your dock."

The truth was, I was bored out of my mind and needed some kind of purpose for getting up in the morning. Two months of nothing but grieving and fishing was about all I could take.

Finally, more out of curiosity than anything else, I let Martha introduce me to her friend Jake, a cranky old cuss who was an ex-cop turned private investigator in Kings Harbor. But what started out as a temporary diversion soon became a passion, and for the better part of three years I worked with Jake, learning the ropes, running his errands, taking notes, and keeping him company on long, tedious stakeouts. Even though the job often consisted of mundane assignments like shadowing cheating husbands, I was constantly learning. But it was only when something really challenging came along that I discovered, much to my own amazement, that I was actually a pretty good detective.

Jake said I had two of the things it took to make it in the business: insight into people which would help me figure out who did what, and gut-instinct which would tell me when to get the hell out of dodge. He also pointed out that what I lacked, besides experience, was patience, something that was bound to get me into trouble. In his final assessment, though, I was a natural-born snoop. High praise, considering.

He paid me next to nothing, but among the invaluable

things I learned from him was an impressive ability to pick locks, which though highly illegal, came in handy now and then, and a fairly good notion of when someone was lying or telling the truth. I also learned enough old cop jokes and stories to last me a lifetime.

Both Martha and Jake insisted I learn to handle a gun, pointing out that living alone in the woods, in a house with no access road, was reason enough to have protection. And while Jake admitted that I'd rarely if ever need to actually use the thing, it would be fool-hardy not to have one on the job. So the firing range became another new hobby, and it wasn't long before I'd become a fairly decent shot with my Smith & Wesson .38.

So here I was, a thirty-year-old woman who could pick locks and handle a gun. I had a license and a bunch of official looking business cards. But despite Jake and Martha's confidence, I'd never really handled a case entirely on my own, let alone a murder case.

If someone had told me that morning, as I walked myself into a sweat, that I would soon be working on a case involving the murder of Walter Trinidad, I wouldn't have believed them. But before I had finished my walk, I was indeed caught up in the whole affair.

*We hope you enjoyed this  
Bella Appetizer.*

