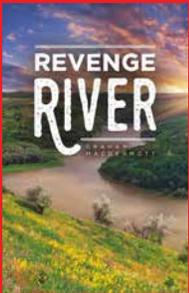


Kyle McKinley is a former RCMP undercover cop and internationally acclaimed artist. He spends his summers at his cabin and studio on a northern New Brunswick river and his winters in deep south Texas.

A dead girl on a beaver lodge with an interesting tattoo. A missing hermit's body found on the shoreline. A fishing lodge where the guests aren't there for the fishing. A mysterious owner, his psychotic bodyguard, a motorcycle gang, deadly drugs, and a Mexican cartel hitman.

McKinley had been looking forward to a quiet summer with his girlfriend on the big river. Not going to happen.



Graham MacDermott is a member of Crime Writers of Canada.

His first novel
REVENGE RIVER
is available in print and e-book.

grahammacdermott.com



RIVER HEAT

Graham MacDermott

RIVER HEAT

a Kyle McKinley novel

Graham MacDermott
author of REVENGE RIVER

Also by Graham MacDermott

Revenge River

RIVER HEAT

A KYLE MCKINLEY NOVEL

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This is a work of fiction. Any similarity to persons living or dead
is purely coincidental and exists solely in the readers mind.

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RIVER HEAT

Prologue

It all started when Danny Pictou was poling two American sports into a deep stillwater about twenty-five kilometres northeast of artist Kyle McKinley's cabin. Danny saw it first. They were just floating by one of two large beaver lodges. It was mid-August and hot and humid, maybe not the best time to be fishing, but they already had some pretty good luck and wanted to get at least another hour in before they headed back to Spruce Lodge.

At first, Danny wasn't sure what he was looking at, but as they got closer, there was no mistaking what it was.

Danny had guided for Cecil and Bunny Robertson for a long time. He was cool, calm, and level-headed, but finding the nude body of a young Asian girl hit him real hard. She was sort of wedged against the edge of the larger of the two beaver lodges, and she still looked pretty good despite the water and the heat of the day.

Danny tied the canoe off on the lodge next to the body and

gently placed a blue plastic tarp that had covered their cooler and portable cook stove over the body.

“Poor, dear little girl,” he said, and then he took his phone from his hip pocket, opened his contact list, and pushed the number for the Milltown RCMP detachment.

“Sam,” he said, “it’s Danny Pictou. You need to send somebody up to the Linton Stillwater. Me and two American sports just found a dead girl.”

Chapter 1

Two days later and about the same time in the afternoon, it was even hotter, and Kyle McKinley was looking out at the river from the picnic table on his front lawn and thinking about his condo in south Texas. He was trying to remember when he had last replaced the hot water heater. It was a while ago, he knew that, and he just hoped it wouldn’t leak before he got back there in the late fall. Maybe he’d go with the on-demand heater — compact, efficient, and nothing to leak. Many of his neighbours were installing them, and he had heard good things. Yes, he decided that was what he was going to do.

He got up from the table and started across to his studio. Break time was over, and he had work to do. He had been working pretty steady since he arrived back on the river in late April. Just as he reached the studio door, he heard a car on the gravel driveway behind his cabin.

McKinley had built the cabin shortly after leaving the

RCMP as an undercover officer in Montreal. He had damn near burned out and wanted to get as far away from outlaw biker violence, drugs, and booze as he could. Before the undercover work, he had been a sniper/observer on an Emergency Response Team. The Mounties had given him some very special and specific skills. Skills he kept well honed. But they had also cost him a wife and an angry liver. That was all a long time ago now. A long time.

He heard a car door slam just as he rounded the corner of his cabin.

“Well, Corporal Sutherland, what brings you upriver?”

Steve Sutherland headed the four-man RCMP detachment in Milltown. It had been his posting for the last five years, and during that time he and his team had investigated two murders and the shooting death of the killer by Sutherland’s friend Kyle McKinley. Actually, Sutherland had been ZIC for that investigation. Headquarters in Fredericton had felt he was a bit too inexperienced to deal with what had become known as the “Marcel Latour affair,” and Inspector Ramsey had sent one of his top officers, Staff Sergeant Marie Arsenaault, up from the capital to lead the search for and capture of Latour. It could have been an uncomfortable situation for Sutherland, but he had handled it well. Arsenaault had impressed everyone on the river. She had particularly impressed McKinley.

McKinley was also impressed with his friend Sutherland and was pleased to see him.

“Hey, Kyle,” Sutherland said as he reached out to shake McKinley’s hand, “I guess maybe you heard about the body Danny Pictou and the two Americans found in Linton Pond.”

McKinley and his young pal, former US Army Ranger

Peter Paul, had fished that stillwater just recently. It was a favourite spot and had over the years been the inspiration for many of his paintings. He loved the look and feel of the place. He had particularly enjoyed the recent outing there with Peter, because such trips had become more infrequent than in the past. Peter had been elected chief of the Narrows Reserve not too long after he, McKinley and Marie had been responsible for the end of Marcel Latour’s wave of violent crime through eastern Canada the past summer. His duties as chief, a marriage, and then the birth of his daughter, Grace, had occupied much of Paul’s time ever since. He had enjoyed the trip to Linton Pond every bit as much as McKinley and had promised the artist they would become more frequent.

“Steve, I haven’t had the TV or radio on for days. Just been listening to some jazz and keeping busy in the studio every day. Come on around front for a cold drink, and you can bring me up to date.” McKinley was intrigued as he led the young officer to the heavy hemlock picnic table. A body in a lake made his old cop juices start to simmer.

“That’ll be more comfortable than the damn canvas chairs in front of the studio. I’ll be right back with some iced tea and a couple of sugar cookies. Made them this morning.”

“Sounds good, Kyle,” Sutherland said as he sat down. “The drink at least. Don’t think I really need the cookie.” He patted his stomach, indicating a weight issue. McKinley couldn’t see it. The young cop was tall and skinny as a beanpole. There didn’t appear to be any excess weight anywhere. He left Sutherland at the table and went in for the tea.

McKinley’s cabin was built on a promontory on a broad loop of the big river. The picnic table was at the very front

Chapter 8

These were the last two entries in Cousins' journal.

August 19, 2016

I'm headed over to the lake. Still real hot and humid. Knee feels better.

August 18, 2016

Hotter than yesterday. Real warm and close. Getting some breeze with doors and windows open but not much. Caught 3 trout this morning. Knee hurts some.

McKinley had read the two entries out loud. He closed the hermit's journal and laid it down on the desk. "Well, we know a little more than we did. This is the twenty-first. Deb and Steve Sutherland were here yesterday, and no sign of Arnie. According to this, he walked over to the stillwater on the nineteenth. I guess he's not been back here since then. Certainly

nothing unusual in Arnie going to the lake."

"I'm calling the boss," Barnes said. "We need to get a crime scene crew out here to do a proper investigation. In the meantime, this place is out of bounds. I'm sure Arnie wouldn't get lost."

The three men went onto the porch, and the constable locked the door. "I need to go back to the truck and get some crime scene tape. Maybe he had an accident. I guess we don't really know if it's a crime scene, but I've got a feeling it may be."

"Yeah," McKinley said, "you may be right. While you hike back out to your car, why don't Dwayne and I walk into the stillwater and look around there? You come in and join us when you get back. Maybe he just had a fall and can't get back." McKinley had a bad feeling.

"You know somethin', I don't see nothin' missin' from the cabin that should be here. Don't look like nobody robbed him or nothin'. Don't make no sense, and for sure Arnie would never get lost. He knew these here woods real good." Dwayne Giberson pushed his grease and sweat-stained ball cap back on his head and pawed at his forehead with his left hand. "Goddamn," he said, "I hope nothin' bad happened to that old bugger. I'm with you, Kyle, let's hoof her for the lake."

It was about another fifteen-minute walk from Arnie's cabin into Linton Stillwater. Some people called it a stillwater, some a big pond, and some called it a lake. It really was a large, lake-size beaver pond, and it changed its shape and size depending on how busy and plentiful the beaver colonies were in any given year and on the spring snow melt and summer rain. There were old water-logged stumps sticking up in many

About the Author



Graham MacDermott is a retired college administrator. He lives in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, with his wife Bonnie. Prior to his college career he was a print and broadcast journalist. *River Heat* is MacDermott's second full length crime novel. His poetry has appeared in *Thumb Prints* and most recently in *Blue Bonnet Review*.

www.grahammacdermott.com