



NEIL TURNER READER'S CLUB

Greetings!

Happy autumn! I hope everyone who is lucky enough to experience the trees changing colours has had a chance to enjoy the spectacle. We're into prime viewing season here in Ottawa. Happy Thanksgiving a few days late to all our Canadian friends. Now it's onward to Halloween and *brrr*, winter. Why can't I hibernate for a few months after trick or treating?

I was at a home retailer this morning and had to dodge an employee carting a pallet of Christmas decorations to the front of the store. Didn't they used to wait until after Halloween to start with the Yuletide stuff??? At the rate they're going, we're going to start seeing Christmas stuff beside bathing suits, BBQs, and swimming pools! When is the earliest you've been run over by a pallet of artificial Christmas trees?

I had the somewhat surreal experience a few weeks ago of finding all five Tony Valenti Thrillers on Amazon's Top 100 Best Sellers list in the conspiracy thriller category. Pretty cool—thanks for helping make it happen! I'm grateful for all the kind and supportive emails and messages. Much appreciated!

Plenty of book news again this month: a new release, deals on books, and an interesting box set promotion for Kindle Unlimited readers. Read on!



The Lincoln Park Zoo is a sanctuary for Tony and his daughter, Brittany. In fact, zoos have been a special father/daughter bonding place for them since she was a toddler.

This month's reader question: Which African mammal is Brittany fond of feeding? She's been doing so since she was a little girl in Atlanta.



Deals, deals, deals

Hot off the press!

I have two upcoming promotions with Written Word Media's New-in-Books. The eBook box set of Books 1-3 will be a featured work the week of October 18th.

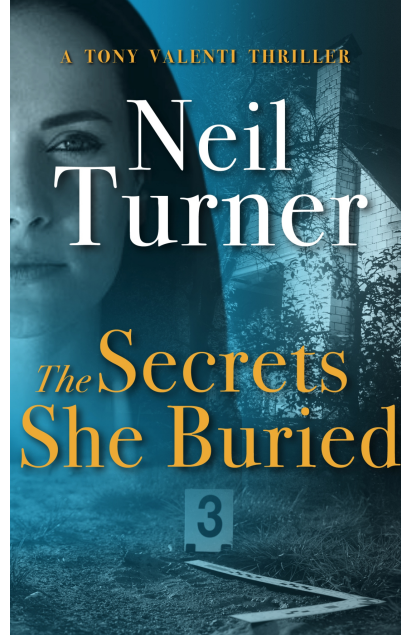
The box set will be discounted for a few days as part of the promotion. I've been invited to contribute a guest blog post about thriller novels as part of the feature. You can read it [here](#). In November, New-in-Books will feature my new novel, *The Secrets She Buried*. I'll be contributing a second blog post as part of that feature and will post a link to it next month. Many thanks to the good folks at Written Word Media for their continuing support and belief in my work. I hope I don't bore their poor blog readers to death with posts in consecutive months!

You'll find more news about *The Secrets She Buried* below. I'm very excited about this book and hope you will be, as well. Presales have been very encouraging.

Delayed but in the home stretch!

Where is the next book?

The sixth Tony Valenti thriller, *The Secrets She Buried*, is in the final stages of production, but a delay in editing means it won't be ready to go as planned on October 27th. Things have been and continue to be hectic, but the book will be released on November 3rd (barring any more last-minute catastrophes). I'm pleased to inform you that the novel will launch at a discounted price of only \$2.99. For all of you who have pre-ordered at the regular price, rest assured that you'll receive the novel at the sale price when your book is delivered. Author Sandy Zelka was kind enough to read through a recent draft and had this to say: *Well done! Looking forward to an autographed copy.*



I've decided to include a Reader's Club exclusive in this month's Reader's Club Update. You'll find chapter one of the new book at the end of this month's update (minus the *final*, final proof-reading, so don't be utterly appalled if there's a typo or two). I hope you enjoy your sneak peek while you wait for the delayed release.



Win a free book!

Monthly Reader's Club Q & A

What's on *your* mind? Submit a question. I'll answer one reader query in every Reader's Club Update. If I choose yours, I'll send you a free eBook copy of my next novel! Please send your questions via the *Contact* page on my [website](#) or send an email

to info@neilturnerbooks.com. If you send an email, please type *Reader's Club Q & A* in the subject line. Thank you!

Q. What's the most difficult part of your creative process?

A. I have a creative process? I thought I just made stuff up! The biggest challenge, especially when writing a series, is to create something fresh so I'm not writing the same story over and over again. I imagine readers would grow bored if I churned out essentially the same book time after time. I would, too! I enjoy

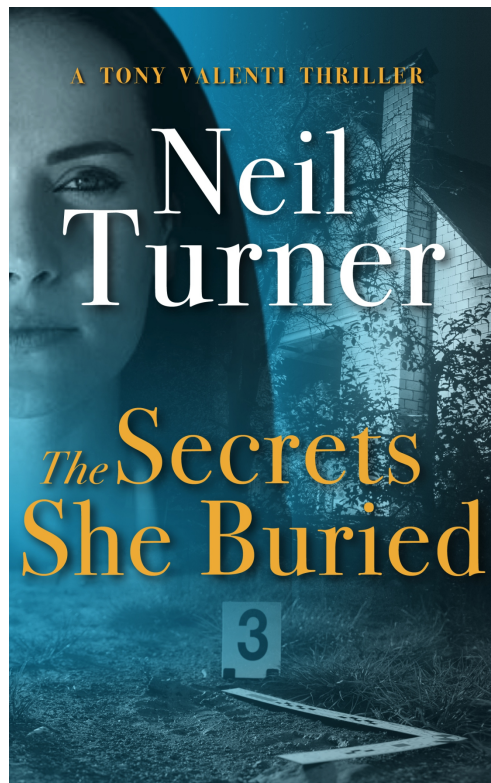
putting Tony and company into new predicaments and pitting them against new villains to discover how they handle things. I want the characters to evolve, growing before our eyes as they tackle new challenges using tools and experience gained along the way. I often hear from readers who appreciate character development as much as thrills and chills.

That's it for this month. Thanks for being a member of our Reader's Club!

Take care, be well, and happy reading,

Neil

Reader's Club Sneak Peek!



CHAPTER 1

It begins on July 1st when my law partner, Penelope Brooks, leads me into her office to be introduced to a potential client. I extend a hand as a woman rises to greet me from a guest chair in front of Penelope's desk.

I introduce myself. "Tony Valenti. Penelope says you have quite a story to tell us."

"Jill Clark," she says. Her handshake is firm. Confident. She's a striking woman: tall, only a few inches shorter than my six feet five,

jet black hair that hangs almost to her waist, an exotic face of mixed ethnicity that I can't categorize. Her brown eyes study me quizzically. I'm being sized up. "People need to pay for my mother's death, Mr. Valenti. You're going to help me punish them."

I shoot Penelope a questioning look. "Have we agreed to represent Miss Clark?"

"Not yet," Clark answers. "But I won't take no for an answer."

I give her a tight smile and sink into the second guest chair facing my partner. Penelope seems amused by the exchange. I'm not. Something in this woman's demeanor unsettles me. I settle my gaze on Penelope and raise my eyebrows in question.

"Miss Clark's mother passed away during the early wave of COVID in 2020."

As someone who recently lost his own mother, I understand the pain of that. I turn to our guest. "My condolences."

"Thank you. Please call me Jill."

"Where do we fit in?" I ask Penelope.

Jill once again answers before Penelope can. "Rush University Medical Center killed my mother. I took Mom there when she became symptomatic. They sent her home to die. What kind of people do that?"

I think back to the first few chaotic months of COVID. Widespread panic. Overwhelmed hospitals. Corpses stacked like cords of wood in refrigerated trucks parked outside morgues and funeral homes. I'm tempted to reply: *Overwhelmed people trapped in a nightmare?* but don't. This woman has lost her mother. "Tell us what happened."

"Not much to tell," she says bitterly. "Mom was in a bad way that morning: fever, coughing, labored breathing. I gave her Tylenol but things grew worse until she was burning up and gasping for air—I had to half-carry her to the car. And then..." Jill chokes up for a moment. "Rush had tents set up to assess people. After an hour, some bitch told me to take Mom home and keep an eye on her. 'We have no room and others are in worse shape' she said. 'Bring her back if she gets worse.' Well, Mom got worse, all right. She was dead by the next morning!"

There's a hardness on Jill's face as she tells the story. Deep creases appear in the skin around her mouth and eyes that give her a weathered look. There's some hard living etched in that face. And a boatload of pain. I suspect there are more sorrowful stories in Jill Clark's past.

"Why now?" I ask. "It's been over two years."

Jill stiffens. "I didn't wait. Mr. Valenti. I sued Rush and lost because I hired a worthless asshole of lawyer. He's facing disciplinary action over his misconduct and incompetence in handling my case, but I'm not done with him."

Sounds like a dream client. I meet Penelope's gaze and nod toward the door. "A minute, partner?"

"Sure. I'll have Mom sit with Jill."

Mom is Joan Brooks, our office manager, paralegal, and mother hen. She bustles in with the coffee pot as Penelope and I cross the hall to my office.

I close the door. "What don't I know?"

"From what she told me, her lawyer should be disbarred, Tony. It's a travesty."

"Oh, my dear, naïve partner," I say with a chuckle as I rest my butt against the front edge of my desk and cross my arms.

Blood rises in my partner's cheeks. Uh oh. I've seen this look before. She isn't blushing in embarrassment.

"I've been speaking with Jill for a half hour, Tony. You're questioning my judgement after spending what, two minutes with her?"

My best course of action is surrender, especially given that she's right to be annoyed with me. The bloodletting with Penelope is infrequent, brief, and always quickly forgotten. Must be that big Kansas heart of hers. But.

"I get a bad vibe from this woman, Penelope."

She sighs. "Fair enough, but she told me some stories. Jill's been through a lot and life hasn't exactly been kind to her. And that attorney of hers. Sheesh! It's no wonder the public hate lawyers. He needs to answer for what he put her through."

"She's filed a complaint with the ARDC and there's an inquiry underway, right?" I ask. Every Illinois lawyer's secret nightmare is an investigation following an ethics complaint to the Attorney Registration and Disciplinary Committee.

"Sure, but this guy needs to bleed, Tony. My guess is that he'll get a slap on the wrist and be sent back out to swindle more clients."

"Out of our hands," I begin, then stop as a possibility I hadn't considered pops into my mind. "Please tell me she isn't asking us to sue her lawyer."

Penelope nods. "Him and the hospital. Separate lawsuits."

Whoa! Brooks and Valenti is an itty-bitty law firm. Two lawyers. One mother. One summer intern. Our current account at the bank

generally covers monthly expenses and little more. We've worked hard to build a reserve fund sufficient to provide a cushion. Let's call it ankle deep.

"Two big liability cases," I murmur. "Both looking for payouts from insurance companies with deep pockets and unlimited resources to fight us."

Penelope's eyes narrow. "We've handled some pretty good-sized cases, partner."

"True, but we kind of stumbled into those."

"*You* stumbled into them, Tony. I went along for the ride."

Also true. "What kind of retainer are we asking for?"

Penelope holds my gaze. "Jill doesn't have a lot of money. She can give us five thousand up front. The rest of our fee will be on a contingency basis."

Has Penelope lost her mind? We'll burn through five grand in a week, maybe two. Both cases will chew up time we don't have, eat investigative resources we can't afford, and let's not even start with the cost of expert witnesses and the like. The insurance company lawyers will know that and drag things out with an eye to bleeding us dry. That won't take long if we have a run of slow billing months. But my partner knows all that.

"I don't know, Penelope. It's not like you to be reckless."

"No, that's your role here, right?" she says with the hint of a smile.

"Well..."

"Maybe it *is* a bit reckless but I want to explore it. I'll handle it myself, maybe hand off a thing or two to Sara."

Sara being our intern, the kid sister of my good friend Mike Williams. She just completed law school at Northwestern and will be sitting for the bar exam this fall.

"If that's what you want to do, Penelope, go for it. I'll stock up on mac and cheese on the way home."

How my daughter might feel about the revised diet is another matter. There's also a pair of hungry hounds to consider. Maybe there's a food bank for destitute lawyers. Nah, probably not; funding would be an issue. The general public may be a tad indifferent to the plight of attorneys forced to exist on something less than filet mignon and canapes.

She smiles. "Thanks, partner."

"You're welcome." I nod toward her office. "Do you need me back in there?"

“No. I’ve got it.”

She returns to her office. I get myself a fresh cup of coffee and return to my desk, put my feet up, and gaze outside. I ponder Jill Clark’s potential cases while taking in the grandeur of downtown Cedar Heights beyond the window of my second-floor window in a recently renovated heritage office block.

When I hear Penelope’s office door open, I look back to see Jill Clark walking out with a triumphant smile. She tosses off an insolent wave as she passes my open door, as if to declare: *I won*. Which suggests that we’ve somehow lost. I wonder what stories lurk in Jill Clark’s past—and if she harbors secrets we’ll one day wish we’d known about today.

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