

# the unusual suspects

After months of speculation that they murdered an Ontario couple at a Mexican resort, Cheryl Everall and Kimberly Kim give **Susan McClelland** an exclusive glimpse into their bizarre plight

IN THE OFFICE OF THEIR THUNDER BAY, ONT., LAWYER, suspected assassins—and single moms—Cheryl Everall and Kimberly Kim offer me limp handshakes before sitting down on a navy-blue leather couch.

“We don’t really like publicity,” says Cheryl, smoothing her hands over her frilly top. “We’re in a state of shock. And on top of it all, there’s all the media,” says the 32-year-old mother of two. While her chatty, outgoing friend does most of the talking, Kimberly is sombre, fingering the gold cross around her neck.

The two haven’t had a moment’s peace since February, when an Ontario couple was found with their throats expertly slashed at a Mexican resort where the two women were also staying. A day after they returned to Canada, the attorney general of the Mexican state of Quintana Roo named them as suspects—an unlikely team to perform this kind of handiwork. Kimberly is a reticent 31-year-old who was working at a hospice and finishing off a psychology degree; Cheryl was about to graduate from the MD program at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ont. They seemed like decent women ensnared by a colossal mistake. Abroad they are now notorious; at home they are famous.

During my three-hour interview with the two women, Cheryl tells me the media hound her at the supermarket and stalk her on her cellphone. A filmmaker wants to shoot a film about them. She tells me that in April, while she was waiting at Toronto’s Pearson International Airport for her new beau, Bill, a man approached her and asked if she was the one accused of murder.

“Hi,” the talkative, outgoing blond recalls telling the man. “I’m Cheryl.”

I look quizzically at her when she tells me this.

“What else am I supposed to say to these people?” she says with a measure of huffy sarcasm, followed by some eye rolling. “We never asked for any of this attention, but we live with it now. It’s frightening for everyone, particularly our children.”

She tells me that recently her older daughter came across a newspaper article that >

In it together: Kimberly Kim (left) and Cheryl Everall on the shores of Lake Superior two months after they were named as suspects in the killing of an Ontario couple in Mexico.



Pressed: Kimberly Kim, right, explains herself to throngs of reporters in Thunder Bay.

quoted her mother's fears about being extradited, how being separated from her two girls was her worst nightmare. "If only they knew you," her daughter told her, sobbing. "If only they knew your story."

With the sensational story faded from front-page headlines, many assume the women no longer face extradition. The attorney general in Quintana Roo, the state where the murder took place, recently said the Canadian women had never been suspects. The Thunder Bay Police Service also said the women are innocent.

But they haven't been cleared. "There were some initial comments made that we didn't think they were involved," says Chris Adams, executive officer for the Thunder Bay police. "The really important thing for us is to pull back, be objective and gather the facts."

The women's lawyer, Lee Baig, isn't optimistic. "These women have not been cleared. The threat of extradition could go on forever."

The allegations surrounding the murder of Domenico Ianiero, a real estate agent, and his wife, Annunziata, have turned into a legal and political morass, creating friction between high-ranking government officials in Canada and Mexico. It has also become a public relations battle fraught with old-school stereotypes: corrupt and self-serving Mexicans; Italian-Canadians (all of whom *must* have mob connections); and a couple of icy-looking blonds up to no good because, after all, they were single women travelling alone.

**BEFORE SHE FLEW TO MEXICO** last February, Cheryl had never even seen the ocean. So when she and Kimberly arrived at the opulent Barcelo Maya Beach Resort on the Mexican Riviera, 85 kilometres south of Cancun, for a friend's wedding, they hit the sand running. Horseback riding on the shore. Snorkelling. Beachside nuptials. The two single mothers had a week of freedom and were out to make the most of it.

On the evening of Feb. 19, they went to Playa del Carmen to buy souvenirs: a Mayan mask, silver jewelry and sarongs – and returned for dinner back at the hotel. It was the last night of their trip, and they capped it off with Coronas on the patio of Captain Morgan's Disco, the resort's pirate ship-themed bar where waiters don outfits inspired by *Treasure Island*. Cheryl gazed at the beach, where she had heard soldiers often patrolled for smuggled cocaine that washed up on the

shore. "That's exactly what we don't need," Cheryl told her friend. "Being in the wrong place at the wrong time." Later, they returned to their rooms and went to sleep, leaving their packing for the next morning.

Early the next day, they were folding up their holiday wear when they heard crying, screaming and swearing outside their door. Alarmed, they went into the terracotta-coloured hallway where they saw a young woman hugging a man, who shouted to the nearby hotel staff: "Do you speak English? Call the police." The women spotted a sprawling dirty stain. "Out of respect for whatever happened, we left," Cheryl says. "I thought it was a domestic fight."

They returned to their suite, picked up their purses and cameras, and headed out to take snapshots of the beach before their return flight. When they returned to their suite through the hotel, a security guard was standing near their door. Kimberly asked what had happened. An accident, replied the guard. She asked if someone died.

"Yes, but everything is ok now," he said.

As they waited in the lobby for the airport bus, departing guests were abuzz about their hallway. One of Kimberly and Cheryl's friends, who was staying in the same wing, had glanced into the suite and saw a woman lying face down in a pool of blood. Cheryl's ex-husband, a cop, had warned her about this kind of stuff in Mexico. He was right.

On the flight home, domestic realities set in. Cheryl would soon be returning to her daughters, the older of whom was going through her first crush. More dauntingly, her father, who had heart problems, suffered a stroke a week before she flew south. She was also three months away from celebrating her graduation from McMaster's medical school. Kimberly had less pressing concerns, but no less burdensome. When this quietly religious woman wasn't looking after her own children, she cared for the dying at a hospice. All of this mundane reality was far away from the impossible glow of those Caribbean beaches.

The day after they touched down in Thunder Bay, a friend of Cheryl's called and told her a couple had been murdered near Playa del Carmen. Cheryl immediately called Kimberly and the two sat glued to their television sets. That's when they learned what had happened. The Ianieros of Woodbridge, Ont., had travelled to Mexico for the wedding of one of their twin daughters, Lily, >

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who was getting married for the second time. They had been found with their throats slashed.

Later that day, another friend called Kimberly with distressing news: Mexican police had released the alleged murderers' last names: Everald and King. "It took a few minutes to sink in," Kimberly tells me. "The Everald was too close. King you can get away with. But I knew it was us, and I was stunned."

**THAT'S THEIR SIDE OF THE STORY**, the innocents-abroad narrative recited to the Thunder Bay police, the RCMP and, eventually, me.

The bodies were discovered by Lily's future father-in-law, Roberto Facecchia. When Annunziata failed to show up for a 7:30 a.m. fitness class and didn't respond to phone calls or knocks on her door, Facecchia had a maid let him in. The two people Cheryl and Kimberly had seen in the hallway were Nancy, Lily's twin sister, and her fiancé. "Our family was in a state of shock," says Anthony Ianiero, Lily's brother and family spokesperson. "My parents were good people. No one had any reason to kill them."

From the outset, Quintana Roo's attorney general, Bello Melchor Rodriguez y Carrillo, suggested that the Ianieros had enemies back home and were slain in what appeared to be a premeditated professional hit. He also stated that two Canadians who had returned to their country were the hired assassins.

The evidence—gathered from Rodriguez's statements and various press reports—includes bloody footprints between Room 4143, where the Thunder Bay women were staying, and the Ianieros' room; and a bloody handprint on Kimberly and Cheryl's door.

But maids cleaned the prints before forensic tests could be conducted. Meanwhile, the police took three hours to arrive on the scene. "We're not forensic scientists or police, but the way things were handled seemed unreal," says Anthony. "The crime scene wasn't sealed off."

Despite the criticism, Mexican officials stand behind their work. "If the investigation was, or had been, followed under low standards, the authorities in Canada would have said so," says Mauricio Guerrero, press attaché for the Mexican Embassy in Ottawa. "On the contrary. The RCMP has recognized the progress as good."

After the bodies were discovered, the

Quintana Roo police focused on Kimberly, Cheryl and a third female from Thunder Bay, who is also under suspicion. (Described by witnesses as heavier set and tattooed, she is also represented by Baig, who won't discuss the details of her case.) They also grilled the Ianiero clan, who, unlike Cheryl and Kimberly, were still in the country. For most of the following week, the 16 Ianiero family members and friends who had flown to Mexico to attend Lily's cancelled wedding were questioned in the resort's hotel rooms—sometimes for five hours in one sitting. Police threatened some of them with imprisonment if they didn't cooperate.

During the sessions, the Ianieros were shown photographs of the various weddings that had taken place at the resort. They recognized two of the guests in Kimberly and Cheryl's wedding group: Cheryl and the tattooed mystery woman. "But my family only knew these ladies from the resort," says Anthony. "Their room was directly across the hall from my sister's room, so it's not surprising that they had met in the hallway, in the restaurant or the bar."

When they weren't being interrogated by police, the Ianiero wedding party spent most of their time huddled together in the hallway and sleeping with as many as five to a room, so frightened were they that the murderer might return.

Frustrated with Rodriguez's progress, the Ianiero family has hired a lawyer in Mexico to oversee their interests there and have also retained an investigator who has concluded there is no link between their family and the three northern Ontario women. Instead, the Ianieros have been urging the Mexican police to investigate a male staffer at the resort who has not returned to work since the murders. Domenico and Annunziata supposedly had an encounter with this employee shortly after their late Saturday-night arrival. The Ianiero matriarch told her family she was unsure of what to make of this man and his services, which seemed to go beyond the call of duty. The security guard seemed to take an undue interest in the couple, insisting on escorting them to their room and offering a foot massage to Domenico, who was suffering from foot problems.

Mexican authorities say robbery was not a motive in the murders, but Anthony Ianiero disagrees, saying numerous items, including his father's watch, were missing from the >

