NINA REILLY: THE BACKGROUND CHECK

Featuring an exclusive excerpt of

PERRI O'SHAUGHNESSY'S

UNLUCKY IN LAW

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We asked Lake Tahoe attorney Beth Melvin what she'd ask Perri O'Shaughnessy if given the opportunity. Here's what she said:

Beth Melvin: It's hard for me to believe that I've been following the legal and personal adventures of Nina Reilly going on ten books now. As a heroine, she gets more interesting with each new installment. How do you keep this woman—first introduced as a determined but struggling single mother with a touch-and-go law practice in Lake Tahoe—so fresh and interesting?

Perri O'Shaughnessy: We planned from the beginning to make Nina a developing character. She started as a rather inexperienced, not-very-savvy young lawyer in *Motion to Suppress* who makes a big legal mistake. As she learned how to handle murder cases, her judgment got better and we think the readers enjoyed watching her learn through experience.

We also let the people around Nina develop. Her son, Bob, has gone from child to teenager. Sandy, her secretary, has taken a leave of absence and a Washington political job, and gotten married. Paul, too, has changed his attitudes since making his own mistakes, like the time he broke his leg in a road rage episode.

But the real secret is that we have taken Nina through ten years of our lives (ten books), and compressed ten years of experiences into about three. So, in addition to taking on way too many trials, Nina has divorced, re-married, been widowed, and fallen in love again. She moves fast—that's why she's interesting.

BM: As a lawyer myself, I find it surprising that there seem to be no other women writing about women lawyers. Sara Paretsky's V. I. Warshawski and Sue Grafton's Kinsey Millhone are both PIs. John Grisham and Scott Turow are obviously males, and though they do write about lawyers, their characters are male. Any theories as to why this might be?

PO: Actually, there are quite a few. Kate Wilhelm has a woman lawyer character. Linda Fairstein, an experienced trial attorney, uses women lawyers. Of course, there are still a lot more men lawyers out there who are turning to writing books, so it's natural that we'd still have more male lawyer characters. Women lawyers are more fun, though, because they are outsiders from the get-go, and their personal lives are far more conflicted in general.

BM: When I read your first book, *Motion to Suppress*, I was immediately struck by how well you portrayed the "old boys network" that so many women lawyers experience. Was it cathartic to write about Nina's experience as a female lawyer in Tahoe?

PO: Sure! It's real, it's ongoing, and many women still feel like outsiders. The "ah-ha" moments come every week—realizing the (male) judge just doesn't feel comfortable chatting with you, that you have to have meetings rather than informal get-togethers at lunch or dinner because you or the (male) lawyer are married, sitting in the Court of Appeals under a dozen portraits of (male) justices, knowing you didn't get the client referral because the (male) lawyer isn't a buddy.

It gets discouraging. Some women lawyers become "old boys"—it can be done. Some get bitter and drink a lot. Some accept that they'll always be on the fringes.

We're talking about the Law of the Father here, law enforced, made, and interpreted primarily by men. When Pam went to law

school, Harvard had just made the switch from a 2% quota for women to 13% women. But once the floodgates opened, women showed themselves to be outstanding students and lawyers. Pam would say women have a natural edge in both verbal facility and human understanding which is gradually lightening the heavy-jawed, bristle-browed face of the law. Meantime, we enjoy making fun of the situation!

BM: As a lawyer in Tahoe, I know when you've taken poetic license with some of your locales. How much freedom do you feel you have when adapting what you know?

PO: Good question. We want to be authoritative and show we know the town and area, and even to tip our hats to some of our favorite restaurants, clubs, and places. But if we're going to show a crime in a location, or accuse an employee of a business, for instance, of the crime, we make up the name. So we have Paul staying at Caesars, a real club at South Lake Tahoe, but we made up a casino/hotel called Prize's so the dirt could go down there.

We admit we did have some bodies buried at the real fire lookout at Angora Ridge in *Invasion of Privacy*, and some readers have gone there and written of their disappointment at not finding a dank sinister basement under it! Other readers have taken their vacation at Tahoe and enjoyed going around to Nina's haunts, so we keep as much as we can real.

BM: You've spoken in previous interviews about what it is like to write as a team, and as sisters living in different states. (Readers, please visit www.perrio.com and www.perrioshaughnessy.com to learn more.) How have your collaborative efforts evolved and changed over time?

PO: Since we have always gotten along well and done things together (we're best friends), writing books together was not a big stretch. Over time we have developed more trust in each other, learned to hold our tongues better when we disagree, and gotten even closer. We feel lucky to have found a way to remain close as adults, no matter where we live.

BM: What scene in one of your own books are you most surprised you wrote? Why?

PO: Pam says it's the one in, we think, *Move to Strike*, when Nina removes her coat in Paul's hotel room to reveal . . . more we cannot say. Must have been a long-buried erotic fantasy surfacing. In *Presumption of Death*, we were surprised at how much fun we had with the lap-dancing scene. In *Acts of Malice*, our brother went over the climactic scene of the killer's death and helped us make it truly scary, better than we could have done on our own. In UNLUCKY IN LAW, our forthcoming book, we were amazed to find out that the person we thought was the killer all the way through wasn't! We're often surprised by how our careful outlines change as we fall into the story and it takes us where it's going.

The Accomplices:
Character Profiles

NINA REILLY

Occupation: Lawyer who somehow always comes back to criminal cases, although often vowing she'll never take another

Education: Monterey College of Law

Physical Appearance: 5'3", long brown hair, brown eyes, curvy

Residences: Lake Tahoe, Nevada, and Carmel, California

Favorite Pastimes:
Playing the slots
Thumbnail biting
Swimming
Hiking
Spending time with her son, Bob

Her secret: No matter where life takes her, she will never give up on justice

Love life:
A checkered past:
Bob's dad, Kurt Scott
(relationship length: six weeks)
Ex-husband Jack McIntyre (lasted five years)
Deceased second husband
Paul van Wagoner,
her on-again-off-again boyfriend
Stay tuned

Motto: Do your duty and work late

Guilty Pleasure: A glass of Clos du Bois in front of the fire. Maybe two.

PAUL VAN WAGONER

Relationship to Nina:	On-again-off-again-on-again boyfriend and colleague
How They Met:	Paul was an old college friend of Nina's ex-husband, Jack McIntyre
Occupation:	Ex-cop, Private Investigator, and Bodyguard Formal company name: Van Wagoner Investigations
Education:	Harvard and Northeastern
Physical Appearance:	"A prime specimen of the male persuasion," as described by Nina's sister-in-law More specifically: Blond hair, sharp hazel eyes, broad shoulders, tall, and world-class butt
Residence:	Carmel, California
Favorite Pastimes:	Jazz Barbecuing Driving his Mustang (where he keeps a gun in the trunk) Knocking bad guys around Proposing to Nina
His Secret:	He may have killed someone and never gotten caught. See *Acts of Malice*.
Love Life:	Married twice—since then, it's (mainly) all Nina
Motto:	Make love, not war, but when war comes, make war
Guilty Pleasure:	Watching the women tourists in the courtyard of the Hog's Breath Inn, which he has a nice view of from his office window

BOB REILLY

Relationship to Nina:	Son, her only child
Full name:	Robert Brendan Reilly "Bobby" when a boy, now goes by "Bob"
Education:	In elementary school (aged ten) when we first meet him in *Motion to Suppress*, now a teenager
Physical Appearance:	Green eyes, dark hair—like his father
His Secret:	He's emailing with an older woman
Favorite pastimes:	Playing the bass in a death metal band Riding his bike Running away
Favorite adventure:	Hitting a serial killer on the head to save his mom
Motto:	Keep after Mom long enough and you'll get it
Guilty Pleasure:	Still likes to sleep with his purple dragon stuffed animal

SANDY WHITEFEATHER

Relationship to Nina: Secretary since the day Nina opened her practice in Lake Tahoe. In actuality, runs Nina's schedule, her office, and tries to run her life. Says Nina: "I hired her for all the wrong reasons and she's made herself indispensable on every front."

How They Met: Sandy saw an ad in the paper and demanded the job the same day

Occupation: See above

Physical Appearance: Obsidian-eyed, short, wide,
Washoe Native American tribe member (a tribe local to the Tahoe area)

Favorite Pastimes: Keeping Nina grounded
Ranching
Holding grudges
Joking around with Paul

Notorious for: Phoning Nina at all hours of the morning and night with news of a new case
Knowing absolutely everyone
Her choice in clothing

Her Secret: She reads all the confidential stuff in the files

Family Life: Mother to Wish and his three sisters, wife of Joseph. They live on a small ranch in Markleeville, Alpine County.

Motto: Crack that whip!

Guilty Pleasure: Keeps a stash of beef jerky

WISH WHITEFEATHER

Relationship to Nina:	Her secretary, Sandy Whitefeather's, son
How They Met:	First appears in *Invasion of Privacy*
Full name:	Willis Whitefeather
Physical Appearance:	6'4", 140 lbs after dinner and cake Long, lank dark hair, eager expression
Occupation Aspiration:	To become a PI like Paul van Wagoner, who he assists on cases and for whom he's been a summer intern. Has a long way to go. Currently studying criminology at Cal State University, Monterey Bay.
Favorite Pastimes:	Writing self-improvement notes in his organizer Finding original ways to lace up his Doc Martens Sketching flowers
Notorious for:	Being arrested for arson
His secrets:	Wants somebody to love
Motto:	(Pulling on sunglasses) Let's roll!
Guilty Pleasure:	Driving Paul's old truck with the leopard-spot bed in back

An Exclusive Excerpt

UNLUCKY IN LAW

by

PERRI O'SHAUGHNESSY

On sale July 2004

Monday, 9/1/03

Because he could never sit still, Bear Cunningham sprang up and shook hands with Nina at the door. He hadn't changed at all over the years. He would be happier jumping up and down in a hallway a thousand times more than being in a meeting. This was a real problem for an attorney who spent much of every day stuck in a chair, dealing with people and their troubles, taking meetings, attending hearings. She could almost see his muscles fighting to escape his skin.

If you wanted to talk to Bear, you walked with him, or you ran with him at noon, or you biked ten miles home with him. You caught him on the fly. He handled the personal injury cases and the business matters. Bear was a smart, cheerful, happily married man, the backbone of the firm by now, she guessed, with Klaus getting older.

The meeting must have started without her, maybe because she wasn't a full-fledged member of the firm and didn't need to know about other cases. Seated in the leather chair by the fireplace that had never, to Nina's knowledge, held a fire, was Sean Eubanks. Nina shook hands with him. "Nice to meet you."

"Delighted." Sean had been with the firm only a year and had the harried look of the one who usually gets the last-minute court appearances. Klaus had told Nina that he was a Yale Law grad who

shared Klaus' passion for the underdog. The youngest lawyer in the office, he was barely thirty and often said he would rather be surfing. His style was classic California lawyer—casual chic, wind-blown and tanned, friendly on the surface with the requisite killer instinct lurking below like that big mean fish all lawyers got tired of hearing about. With a special interest in fathers' rights and gay rights in custody cases, he handled family law cases for the firm.

Nina found a spot on the ancient couch along the window. Adjusting his specs from behind his desk, Klaus said, "I realize that I have not reported on the status of this case for some time, so I am kicking two dogs with one foot. The trial date is September fifteenth."

"That's only two weeks away," Alan Turk said. "Even if you're fully prepared, Klaus, Nina will have a hard time catching up." Alan sat next to Nina on the couch holding his coffee, one leg hooked over the other, slightly cross-eyed behind his glasses and blue tie. His hair had thinned badly, and his back seemed to have bowed as he entered his fifties. He had given her his usual nod, as if she hadn't been away eight years, and Nina had nodded back.

She had enjoyed working with Alan as a law clerk. He was methodical, organized, and never lost his temper. "Anal Alan" Bear had once called him in a conversation with Nina, showing the litigator's distaste for the lawyer who sits back at the office generating and responding to the details of law practice.

But as the trusts, wills, and estates man, with a certification in tax law, Alan had always brought in a steady high flow of income to the firm. Without it, Bear couldn't fly his more risky PIs and Klaus couldn't pursue his endless appeals. He was a bachelor who owned a 2001 metallic blue Ferrari that, word had it, had cost almost two hundred thousand dollars. The firm building, in line with the rustic ambience of Carmel, had only a one-car garage on the street. Alan kept the Ferrari there under security far superior to the systems for the rest of the building. He also owned two other rare automobiles. Nina didn't keep track of what kind.

Klaus, Bear, and Alan had all helped Nina get started in law. Even now she sometimes dreamed of this office with its lamps and photos and books, and the old man sitting behind his desk with the

little smile. To be here again, her eyes falling upon Klaus' favorite Meissen figurine on the mantel, was disconcerting yet felt as comfortable as a trip back to the old homestead.

"Of course we're fully prepared." Bear continued to champion Klaus, as he always had. "Nina, have you had a chance to review the files?"

"I'm doing that today. I met the client this morning."

"How'd that go?"

"He told me his story. Really, there wasn't enough time to form an opinion of his chances." Bear, Alan, and Sean shot smiles around that landed eventually on her. They seemed to know a few things she didn't. Perfectly natural. "I have the general outline," she went on. "I'm sure I can take the second chair, help with the cross-exams and—"

"Do brilliant work," Klaus said.

"Work hard, anyway," Nina said. She sat up straight, trying to look like the kind of person who wouldn't let anything get by her.

Klaus smiled and nodded, his white goatee jabbing the air. Meeting him for the first time in years the previous week, Nina had been amazed at how little he had changed. Perhaps after seventy there is a long, placid evening for some people during which they finally take on their real form and stick with it. He still had the twinkly eyes; sparse white hair on his head, which, as he didn't like the cold ocean air, was often covered with an archaic homburg; a black suit, red tie, and, on court days, a flower in the buttonhole, tucked in no doubt by his devoted wife, Anna. The only difference Nina saw was that he seemed to be a couple of inches shorter now that he had reached his early eighties.

Klaus had always taken the criminal cases and the appeals. His national reputation dated back from his noisy, contentious teaching days at the University of Chicago and at UC Berkeley. He and his wife, Anna, had come out to California just before the Second World War from somewhere they refused to talk about in Europe, somewhere German-speaking, Austria, maybe. That one of them was Jewish was all Klaus would ever say, and that had given Nina enough to reconstruct a basic history. Klaus had helped defend Angela Davis and had been a friend of Henry Miller's and Linus

Pauling's in their Big Sur days.

"Our client," Klaus said, "as you will remember, is Stefan Wyatt, a young man in a hell of a pickle. He has not been able to make the high bail and has therefore been in jail for four months. Though I tried to talk him out of it, he was adamant. He wanted a quick court date. He wants out of jail."

"Short amount of time to prepare for a murder case," Sean said.

"An innocent young man is in jail," Klaus said. "Technically, he has a right to a trial within sixty days."

Nina listened, more interested than the others. Any new details to come today were helpful to her. Klaus had told her that he required her assistance and that he assumed she would fly to his side, which she had. He blew off her objections like dandelions. She would play a small role as backup. He had everything worked out, he had assured her.

Klaus had always kept his cases close, maybe because he was the only criminal lawyer at the firm and nobody else could give him much help with strategy. Bear appeared for him now and then in Law and Motion hearings, but he didn't like criminal defense.

"Why was he arrested?" Sean asked. "There was something strange about that." He furrowed his brow, then snapped his fingers. "Bones tucked into the backseat of his car, right?"

"Precisely," Klaus nodded. "And those bones will be key to helping us explain Mr. Wyatt's presence in the graveyard that night. But what concerns us most is the second body the police found in the grave Mr. Wyatt is accused of robbing, the body of a woman, Christine Zhukovsky."

Sean's blond head bobbed up and down. "I remember now—he was stopped because he had a taillight out. And then the cop saw a skeleton flopping around in the backseat. Wyatt sounds like one of those guys who can't jaywalk without stepping in front of a patrol car."

"At least he didn't talk to the police," Alan said. He tapped his fingers on the leather. His nails were manicured to soft pink curves, perfect as shells shaped by a century's tides. Obsessiveness was a good trait in a tax lawyer, Nina reflected. Alan was well known

locally as an exacting collector of very rare, small fine arts objects and sculpture. His office, which displayed only a small but spectacular grouping of jade netsuke, had the organizational rigor of a military locker room.

Years before, Nina had gone to Alan's house for an office celebration and marveled at the elegance of the decor. He pressed a tiny bronze sculpture of a dancer into her hands to appreciate, and told her everything about it for the next twenty minutes. His love of beauty spilled over into the kind of women he married, another form of collecting, Nina thought, but you didn't get to keep all the women.

"Stefan Wyatt has had experience with law enforcement," Klaus said. "He doesn't trust the police, and was wise enough to say nothing and to call us immediately."

"Do we admit the grave robbery?" Sean asked. He didn't ask whether the client had confessed to Klaus. Since they were closing in on a trial at which they would claim the client was innocent no matter what he had told his lawyer in the cloister of their confidential relationship, that would be bad form.

"Yes. There is a complication, however. Mr. Wyatt found a medal in the grave and put it in his pocket. The value of the medal makes the theft a grand theft charge, a felony."

"Sounds pretty minor in the context of the murder charge."

"Ah, but it is not minor, Mr. Eubanks. The young man has a record. Two previous felony convictions. Violent felonies, and he did time for both. The first was for throwing a brick at a police officer at a demonstration. He was convicted of assault and served four months in the county jail. He had just turned eighteen."

"That was bad luck," Bear said. "The birthday, I mean. If he'd been seventeen . . ."

Klaus went on, "While still on probation, at the age of nineteen, he struck another young man with his fist at a neighborhood party. Both young men had been drinking. Unfortunately, the boy he struck fell against the curb and suffered a skull fracture. Mr. Wyatt pled guilty to assault again and was sent back to jail, for eight months this time."

"This is one bad-luck kid," Sean said.

"His victims were the ones with the bad luck," Alan said.

"Let's not forget them. Sounds like you've got a client that deserves to go down."

Klaus found the comment unworthy of a reply. "Mr. Wyatt was released after five years' probation and he has kept himself employed and clean," he concluded. Nina made a note to herself to go into those priors in more detail with Stefan.

"Which makes a conviction for the medal a third-strike conviction, even if he's acquitted of the murder," Bear said. "Mandatory twenty-five years to life under California law."

"Do we have the resources to handle a murder trial with a three-strikes complication?" Sean asked. Bear frowned at him, which Nina interpreted to mean don't question the old man's judgment, you barking young pup.

"Nina and I will handle it," Klaus said dismissively. You could view Klaus as laudably confident or you could view him, as Sean probably did at that moment, as arrogant.

"We are being paid—how?" Alan reverted to his usual motif, money, using a finger and thumb to neaten the crease in his trouser leg.

"We accepted a ten-thousand-dollar retainer and five thousand dollars as an advance against expenses. We are taking payments from Mr. Wyatt's mother as further fees are incurred. It's hard for her. She had to get a loan. His brother, Gabriel Wyatt, is helping. He was Mr. Turk's client at one point and remembered us fondly enough to refer his brother to us when he was arrested," Klaus told Alan.

"I was called over to the jail right after Wyatt's arrest," Alan explained to the rest of them, apparently not pleased at the memory. "Klaus was down with the flu and you were in depositions in L.A., remember, Bear, and Sean had a trial the next day. I lined things up for Klaus to see him. I only had a consult with his brother Gabe, so I was surprised when the family called me, but I guess I was the only lawyer they knew. Gabe has a job, but I'm also guessing that you're not charging him full freight. Am I right, Klaus?"

"You are right, Mr. Turk," Klaus said, unperturbed. "We are charging fifty percent of our usual hourly rate plus actual expenses."

"Just so everybody's straight on this. At the moment overhead's

running sixty-five percent." Alan glanced at Nina.

Kachung. Overhead. Negative balance sheet.

"Is the D.A. offering any kind of plea bargain? Do we really have to try this one?" Sean asked.

"Any felony conviction runs a risk of a three-strikes enhancement, so we cannot bargain," Klaus said. "The trial will take no more than a month by my estimate. We have had a good year, gentlemen. You all received ample year-end bonuses. Now we give back by helping this young man."

Alan said in an ungentlemanly fashion, "I referred him to you because I felt obligated, but I never understood why you took this case in the first place, Klaus. We're mixed up in something—unsavory. There's no new law to be made, no real money in it for the firm, no noble point to his crimes."

Klaus stared at Alan, lips turned down, as if generally unhappy with his attitude toward their client. "Alleged crimes," he corrected Alan softly. "Yes, Mr. Turk, your objections from the start have been noted. However, I did not found this law firm forty years ago to make money. I founded it to seek justice and make law."

"Oh, please," Alan said, rolling his eyes. "The jails are full of guys just like him, probably a hell of a lot more worthy."

"I am shocked at you, Mr. Turk," Klaus said. "Mr. Wyatt's brother was your client, and he needs help."

Silence fell.

Bear said, "Give it a rest, Alan. You have enough money for a thousand years from your parents. The client's family is paying most of the freight. Let's get on with practicing law."

"Somebody has to pay the secretaries," Alan said but without heat. He had decided not to take Bear on.

"It's good to have you on board," Sean told Nina.

"Thanks. I'm sure we'll do fine," Nina said briskly. "You'll be seeing a couple of new faces around the office besides me. Sandy Whitefeather, my secretary from Tahoe, has come down to assist me. You'll pass her in the hall. You might want to take the initiative with her and introduce yourself. She a very capable person but, uh, a little shy."

"I ran into her this morning," Sean said. "Shy might not be

the right word for her. She's—prepossessing. From the Washoe Tribe, she said?"

"Right. Descended from the first inhabitants of Tahoe. Good people."

"Big money in casinos these days," Alan said.

"The Washoe have chosen a different way. Ask her about it. That, she'll talk about."

Everyone smiled, understanding this would probably lead to a lecture. The meeting had settled back down, to Nina's relief.

"You all know Paul van Wagoner, I think. He'll be taking over as our investigator. And we're bringing in Dr. Ginger Hirabayashi as our forensic pathologist." Nina knew Ginger well and had made the suggestion to Klaus. Although he seemed satisfied with the work that had been done already, she had been relieved to discover that he was willing to go further based on her recommendations.

Klaus broke a smile and pushed his chair back. "And I am happy to repeat that we now have on board this lovely young lady prepared to stagger us with her energy and legal skill. She will be the saving grace of this unfortunate young man. Let us have lunch and celebrate, eh?"

And so, although time was tight and Nina knew she should work through lunch, they all piled out the door, Nina in the place of honor, walking alongside Klaus at his sedate pace into Carmel's tangy ocean air. They made their way through the tourists to the Alpine Bistro. Klaus went through the door into the heavenly smells waiting inside. As Nina prepared to follow, Bear pulled her aside onto the flower-filled veranda.

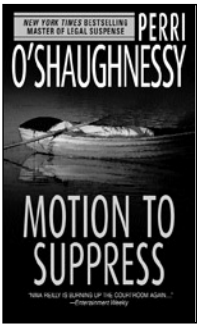
"I'm glad you're back, Nina, really happy. Let us know what we can do to help. Anything." The weather-beaten lines of his face shaped a wholehearted smile. "Klaus needs the help."

Through the window she saw Klaus sit down in the place where he had eaten lunch for forty years. The waitress and the manager stood by, ready to attend him. He caught her looking his way and grinned so widely, she could see his gums, as pink as a baby's.

The meeting had disturbed her. It felt as if the other lawyers were indulging Klaus with this case. They hadn't even tried to quiz him about strategy and defenses, questions she would have

Nina Reilly:
The Case Overview

MOTION TO SUPPRESS

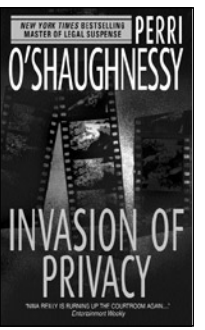


"A lively debut . . . the plot is a real puzzler, with twists diabolical enough to take to court."

—The New York Times Book Review

Recovering from a bad marriage and an even worse career setback, San Francisco attorney Nina Reilly has relocated to Lake Tahoe to give her young son a secure home and build up a small practice. But, when Misty Patterson walks in the door, a blond cocktail waitress accused of murder, it triggers a harrowing series of events. The case is going to change everything Nina believes about the law. But if the two women can learn to trust each other, it will give them both their only chance to reclaim their shattered lives.

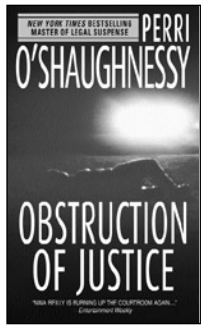
INVASION OF PRIVACY



"Gripping courtroom drama . . . Heart-stopping . . . Riveting." ***—Booklist***

Terry London, a filmmaker whose documentary about a missing girl has raised disturbing questions, suddenly turns up dead. Against better judgment, Nina decides to defend the accused murderer, a man she'd known years before and hoped never to see again—dredging up memories she'd prefer to keep buried. As the evidence against her client mounts in a case that gets more dangerous every day, Nina's only chance to save him may be illegal. And if it fails, Nina may lose the case, her practice . . . and even her life.

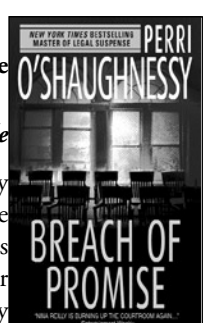
OBSTRUCTION OF JUSTICE



"A roller-coaster ride . . . a tale not to be missed." ***—The Midwest Book Review***

Two people have died in shocking accidents. In a nearly empty parking lot, a hit-and-run driver kills probation officer Anna Meade Hallowell. High up on a jagged mountain, wife abuser Ray de Beers gets struck by lightning. Attorney Nina Reilly, hiking on a rare day off from her one-woman law practice, sees him die and she is certain de Beers' death is an act of God. But when his aging father insists on exhuming the body to rule out foul play, what gets unearthed are secrets that raise new questions about the seemingly coincidental deaths and a damning piece of evidence that can convict an innocent boy.

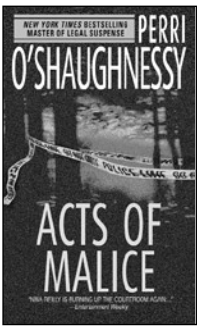
BREACH OF PROMISE



"A legal mystery for thoughtful readers . . . The surprise twists are wonderfully effective."
—San Francisco Chronicle

In glitzy Lake Tahoe, couples break up every day. But few are as successful as Lindy and Mike Markov, who built a $200-million business together—before Mike took up with a younger woman. Now he's claiming he doesn't owe Lindy a dime since they never married. Nina Reilly, struggling to make a living in her one-woman office and raise a young son alone, agrees to take Lindy's case. It's the kind of case—full of passion and explosive secrets—that could make a fortune for a young lawyer. Or drive someone to commit murder—for love, money . . . or the right verdict.

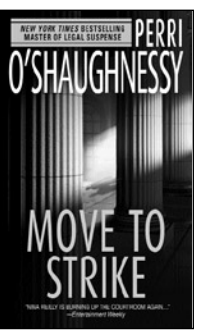
ACTS OF MALICE



"Will keep you turning the pages into the night. . . . Pleasantly twisty . . . [a] wham-bam, heart-racing climax." ***—USA Today***

Amid the sparkling snow-swept mountains of Lake Tahoe, Nina Reilly has taken on a case that will draw her into a tangled web of loyalties and alliances within one of the town's most prominent families. Her client: a man accused of murdering his own brother on the ski slopes of Tahoe. The law says Nina must give Jim Strong the best possible defense but Strong's family has turned violently against him, and Nina suddenly finds herself at the center of the storm. As she works a flawed and troubling case and gets swept into an unexpected love affair, the two sides of Nina's life come crashing together . . . in the ultimate act of malice.

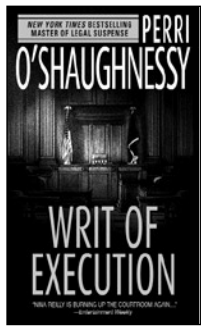
MOVE TO STRIKE



"A fast-paced page-turner . . . Plenty of plot twists and turns." ***—New York Post***

Sixteen-year-old Nicole Zack, rebel, thief, and best friend of Nina Reilly's son, Bob, is on trial for the murder of her uncle, a prominent plastic surgeon who's made more than his fair share of enemies. Nina warily takes on the case and calls in ex-lover Paul van Wagoner to investigate the eerily coincidental death of the surgeon's son—killed in a plane crash the same night. As Nina sorts through the twisting lies surrounding the murder, she uncovers a seething mystery, some enraged former patients, and two very old crimes.

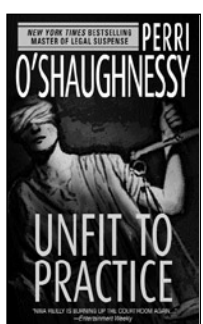
WRIT OF EXECUTION



"Tense and fast-paced . . . intriguing legal maneuvers and gripping courtroom drama." ***—The Tampa Tribune***

A young woman has just hit a seven million dollar jackpot on a slot machine and the money is hers as soon as she divulges her real name. With time running out—and a ruthless man on her trail—she enlists the help of Nina Reilly to devise a plan that will enable her to collect the money without giving up her true identity. After all, the woman who goes by Jessie Potter risks losing her life—and all she holds dear—if the man from her past goes outside the law to get what he wants. But a moment of chance and enough money to save troubled lives has awakened a killer.

UNFIT TO PRACTICE



"Here's to a lawyer with as much heart as brains."

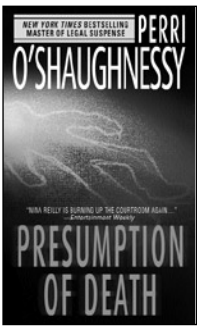
—*People* (Page-turner of the week)

It's every attorney's worst nightmare—one careless moment that changes everything forever. When confidential case files are stolen from her car, Nina finds herself fighting for her license in a legal proceeding that may ultimately put an end to her career—and her life. In desperation, she must turn to her ex-husband, Jack McIntyre, to represent her. And as personal tensions erupt between McIntyre and Nina's sometime-boyfriend, PI Paul van Wagoner, a chilling pattern of rage and revenge comes into focus.

PRESUMPTION OF DEATH

"Nina Reilly keeps . . . getting better. Generous heart, steel-trap brain, elegant looks: great fun to read about."

—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review



In three years, she's taken on some of Lake Tahoe's most controversial cases and has turned her struggling one-woman law firm into a thriving practice. Now Nina Reilly's heading back to her hometown of Carmel Valley, California, to put her troubled past behind her. But within days of her arrival, Nina is already feeling the heat, as a case of serial arson exposes some of the darkest secrets of her hometown. And out of the flames a terrifying picture emerges: a community steeped in mystery and rage, a tangled history between two men, and a killer whose motives are dark and wrenching.