

The book cover features a vibrant, multi-colored quilted border. The central image is a photograph of a weathered wooden post with a white, rusted horseshoe nailed to it. To the left of the post, there are several dark red flowers with green foliage. The title 'A Quilt of a Different Color' is written in a large, yellow, serif font across the top of the central image. Below the title, the text 'A HARRIET TRUMAN/LOOSE THREADS MYSTERY' is written in a smaller, white, serif font. At the bottom of the central image, the author's name 'Arlene Sachitano' is written in a large, white, serif font.

A Quilt of a Different Color

A HARRIET TRUMAN/LOOSE THREADS MYSTERY

Arlene Sachitano

Luke hurried into the barn ahead of Harriet and disappeared into the feed room. Harriet gathered Major's blanket and headed down the aisle. Simon was sitting in his chair in front of Major's stall, his back to her.

Oh, great, she thought. She'd been hoping to slip in, try Major's blanket on, and go home for her morning run. Simon undoubtedly was waiting for Luke, as she couldn't imagine what he'd want to talk to her about.

"Simon," she called when she was two stalls away. He didn't reply. She called out again, louder, as she continued closing the distance. He still didn't respond. She slowed her approach.

His head was leaning at an odd angle. She made a wide circle around his chair.

"Oh, Simon," she murmured as she pulled her phone from her purse and dialed 911.

He was slumped against the headrest of his chair, his skin gray-blue. He had an angry-looking red ring around his neck where something had clearly been used to squeeze the life from him.

"Yes, this is Harriet Truman," she said when her phone connected. "I'm at the Miller Hill Equestrian Center, and I've just found a dead man in front of our horse's stall... Yes," she replied when the speaker asked if she was sure he was dead.

She agreed to stay where she was and to not touch the body. She didn't need to be told. This wasn't her first dead body, after all.

ALSO BY ARLENE SACHITANO

The Harriet Truman/Loose Threads Mysteries

Quilt As Desired
Quilter's Knot
Quilt As You Go
Quilt by Association
The Quilt Before the Storm
Make Quilts Not War
A Quilt in Time
Crazy as a Quilt
Disappearing Nine Patch
Double Wedding Death
Quilts Make A Family
The 12 Quilts of Christmas

The Harley Spring Mysteries

Chip and Die
Widowmaker

The Permelia O'Brien Mysteries

Double Knit



**A QUILT
OF A
DIFFERENT
COLOR**

**A Harriet Truman/Loose Threads
Mystery**



ARLENE SACHITANO



ZUMAYA ENIGMA

2021

AUSTIN TX

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons or events is purely coincidental.

A QUILT OF A DIFFERENT COLOR

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For Michele Voorhees

Chapter 1

“Tell me again why this woman couldn’t come to our meeting,” Lauren Sawyer said as she got out of Harriet’s car.

Harriet Truman locked up and joined her in the parking area of the Miller Hill Equestrian Center.

“Aunt Beth was right behind us when we left Pins and Needles.” She looked around. “They must have stopped somewhere.”

“Like we should have. I’ll bet they got drive-through coffee. They figured out we were going to be freezing, standing around talking about whatever we got called here for. Remind me again why we’re here?”

“Would you stop complaining? You know we’re here to look at some sort of horse blanket. Makes more sense to me for us to come to the horses.”

Harriet’s aunt pulled up beside them in her silver Beetle and got out along with her friends and fellow quilters Mavis Willis and Connie Escorcia. Beth reached back into the car and brought out a carrier with three steaming cups. Connie and Mavis already held theirs.

“Here, I figured you two could use a hot drink, and I didn’t see you stop, so I took the liberty of bringing you something.”

Lauren stepped forward and took a cup. She sipped it with her eyes closed.

“Mmmm...” she said, “Hot cocoa.”

Harriet took a cup.

“Thank you, so much.”

Beth took the remaining one and tossed the carrier back into her car.

“Do you have any idea what the trainer wants to talk to us about?” she asked.

“Luke wasn’t sure, but he said she was talking about some sort of saddle blanket a horse wears when they’re riding it. He hasn’t seen one.”

“Your boy’s horse is so big it undoubtedly needs a custom-made one, but one person could do that,” Mavis said. “Marjorie said the new stable manager wanted to meet with all of us. That sounds like a lot of these blankets.”

Lauren nodded at the open barn doors. A woman was walking toward them.

“I think we’re about to find out.”

“Hi,” the tall, slender woman said as she approached. She was dressed in tan riding pants and a brown down vest over a long-sleeved white shirt. Her dark-brown hair was pulled back into a tight braid.

Aunt Beth extended her hand when the woman reached them.

“Hi, I’m Beth Carlson. These are my friends, Mavis, Connie, Lauren, and my niece Harriet. We’re waiting for two more—Jenny Logan and Carla Salter.”

“I’m Angela Tavarious, the new stable manager. Let’s go on into the barn where it’s warmer.”

She led them to the center of the building, where the main aisle bisected another one. A large electric space heater glowed from the beams.

“Have any of you been to our equestrian center before?” Angela asked. “I’m sorry, being new here, I don’t know who is who yet.”

“Lauren and I have,” Harriet volunteered. “My foster son Luke has his horse Major stabled here.”

“The big gray guy?” Angela said and smiled. “He’s not your usual saddle horse.”

Harriet heard Major whinny from down the aisle. He must have recognized her smell, or more likely that of the carrots in her coat pocket.

“He’s a former police horse,” she said and pulled out the bag of cut-up carrot pieces. “I’m going to give him his carrots before he starts kicking the door.”

Which he was already doing by the time she approached.

“Hey, settle down, big guy,” she told him and opened his stall door. “Luke couldn’t come yesterday—he has a cold, and we made him stay home.” She held a handful of chopped carrots on her flat hand, and he picked them off with his soft lips. “James sent you these leftovers from the restaurant.”

“That horse is even more spoiled than those two mutts you live with,” Lauren said, coming up behind Harriet.

“Luke loves him, and he seems to love Luke, so in my book, he gets all the spoiling he needs.”

“Which somehow leads to us having to make whatever this lady wants us to make, to make Luke happy.”

“You don’t have to participate, you know. Loose Threads quilting projects are always voluntary.”

Lauren ran her hands through her long blond hair, sweeping it back on her shoulders.

“Don’t listen to me, I’m frustrated with an impossible client right now. I haven’t stitched on a quilt or anything else because of his increasing demands. He calls all hours of the day and night asking for changes that are meaningless. His product is finished, but he’s unwilling to launch it.”

“I’m sorry,” Harriet said.

“Well, it is what it is. Look, Jenny and Carla have arrived. Let’s go see what’s going on.”

“This is all of us,” Aunt Beth was saying. “Now, what is it you need?”

“Well, as I said, my name is Angela Tavarious, and I’m the new manager of Miller Hill Equestrian Center. With my husband Simon. We’ll be running things here.

“We were brought in without much warning. The stable we had been working at unfortunately burned down, and the owners decided not to rebuild. I gather something happened here that resulted in the former manager being removed with little warning.

“Now, it appears there’s a horse show in the works, six weeks from now. That puts it at the last week in February, which means it’s likely to be cold. I’m not sure how things were done here in the past, but I like horses to wear a quarter-sheet to keep their kidneys warm to make it easier to remove the lactic acid buildup that can occur when horses are working. This is only a worry when it’s forty degrees or below, but since our show is in February, it could be an issue.”

“I’m guessing these quarter-sheets are quilted?” Harriet asked.

“They can be. They can be made of wool, flannel, or even crocheted. Some people buy ones that cover the rider’s legs as well. Those, of course, aren’t appropriate for a horse show.

“I like ones with a narrow shape that fits under the saddle and then spreads out over the horses’ hips. When I heard from some of the local people about an active quilt group in the area, I wondered if you could make quilted quarter-sheets. They could even have designs on the part that covers the flanks.

“I’ll completely understand if it’s too much trouble. In my mind, it would look very striking. Look, I’m going to go check on my stall cleaning

crew and see how things are progressing. Will that give you enough time to decide if you'd like to take on this project?"

"That will be fine," Beth assured her.

They watched as she turned down the side aisle and out of sight.

Harriet sipped her cocoa. "What do you think? Anyone?"

Jenny rubbed her hands together briskly.

"I think it sounds interesting."

"How do we figure out the shape?" Carla asked.

"We'll have to think about it," Harriet said, "but right offhand, I think I would take a piece of muslin and lay it over the horse and then pin darts into it until it lays flat. Then I'd use that as the pattern."

"If we're going to machine-quilt them, we should probably mark the dart lines on the muslin but not cut them. That way, we can maintain the rectangular shape. We can cut away the batting and backing after it's quilted and then sew the darts," Aunt Beth suggested.

Mavis sipped her latte and then raised her cup.

"I'm in."

"Me, too," Connie said, doing the same.

One by one, the rest held up their cups, tapping them against Mavis's in agreement.

"I'll call Sarah and see if she's interested," Jenny said.

Connie sat down on a bench by the wall.

"I wonder what sort of design she's thinking about."

Mavis joined her.

"Some sort of appliqué, no doubt."

They debated the merits of machine-stitched appliqué vs. fused appliqué vs. needle-turned appliqué as it related to durability in this particular situation.

"Can I assume from your discussion you're at least considering my request?" Angela asked, joining them again.

Mavis stood up.

"I think we've agreed we will try. To my knowledge, none of us has ever attempted anything like this before."

"And there's no guarantee we'll be successful," Beth added.

"But we're willing to give it our best," Connie finished.

"We'll go back to the quilt shop and do some figuring," Mavis said.

Harriet tossed her empty cup into a trashcan beside the bench.

"Do you have an average-sized horse we can measure to get started? I'm thinking measuring Major wouldn't do us much good."

Angela chuckled.

“Very true. Wait here. I’ll bring one of the school horses out.”

Connie and Jenny pulled retractable tape measures from their purses, and Lauren took her tablet computer from her messenger bag and turned it on. Angela led a tall bay gelding into the aisle and attached cross ties to his halter on each side.

“Nick here is a very gentle beginner’s horse, so feel free to do whatever you need to do to get your measurements.”

Harriet took the end of Connie’s tape and unwound a few feet before walking carefully behind him and stretching the tape over his back. Lauren tapped numbers into her pad until they’d recorded every possible dimension on Nick.

“Do we need to custom-make each one to fit a particular animal?” Jenny asked.

Angela attached a lead rope to Nick’s halter and detached the two cross-tie ropes.

“They don’t need to be that precise. Maybe a small, medium, and large option?”

“We can do that,” Harriet said.

“Do you need Nick for anything else?” Angela asked, and when no one said anything, she led him back to his stall.

Chapter 2

Harriet was in her studio sketching design possibilities for the quarter-sheets when Luke came in from the kitchen. He held the sandwich she'd made for him in one hand and a glass of milk in the other.

"Hey, how was school?" she asked him.

He laughed. "You never quit trying, do you."

"I know you're never going to love it, but I hope things are a little better."

"Actually, things *are* a little better. A few people from school have signed up to take riding lessons at the stable since the new management took over. We've started having lunch together to talk about the horses."

"That sounds good."

"A couple of guys who are still living in bad foster homes aren't too happy about it."

Harriet set her grid paper pad on the table.

"You're in a tricky situation. You got to leave a crowded, miserable place to come live with us, and those other kids didn't. That's not your fault. And we would like to help every kid living in a bad situation, but we can't. If you went back to living in an overcrowded, neglectful home, it wouldn't help those other guys at all."

"So, what am I supposed to do?"

"You make the best of every opportunity you're given. You grow up to be a productive member of society and do what you can to make the world a better place. Do things like James does feeding the homeless, or the quil-

ters do, making warm blankets for the kids, or teach people to read, like Connie does—whatever you can do to make the world a better place. But for right now, take care of yourself.”

“Sometimes I feel guilty about...” He spread his arms wide, “...all this.”

“I think that’s called survivor’s guilt. I’m not sure how you feel about religion or church. I mean, I know you’ve been coming with us, but your beliefs are just that—yours. Having said that, if you’re comfortable at church, you could try talking to Pastor Hafer. I’ve found him to be pretty helpful when I’ve been confused about things. I’m sure he’d be able to help you with this.”

“He won’t think I’m being a selfish ingrate?”

Harriet smiled.

“I promise he will not judge you.”

Luke took a bite of sandwich and chewed thoughtfully.

“I guess it can’t hurt. I’m getting nowhere with it, and Major hasn’t been much help on this one.”

“Give the pastor a call when you’re ready, and let me know if you need a ride somewhere to meet him.”

“Will do, for now, though, can I get a ride to the stable? The new manager’s husband wants to talk to Emily and I and the other therapy volunteers this afternoon. I guess he ran a program where they were before, and he wants to tell us about it.”

“What time do you need to be there?”

“Four o’clock. He said to plan on being there for about two hours.”

Harriet looked at her watch.

“It’s three now, so finish your snack, and I’ll take the dogs for a quick walk before we go.”

At the mention of the words *dogs* and *walk*, Scooter and Cyrano got up from their beds in the studio and started jumping at her leg.

Harriet smiled.

“I guess I better get the leashes.”



Harriet texted Lauren while the dogs circled her legs, tangling her in their leashes.

Luke has a two-hour meeting at the stable. Want to meet for coffee?

When and where?

Steaming Cup 4:20

See you there.



Lauren was at a table, drink in front of her, when Harriet arrived. She ordered a London Fog tea latte and headed for the table to wait while it was being made.

“Who is Luke’s meeting with?” Lauren asked when Harriet was settled.

“Apparently, the new stable manager’s husband ran a therapy-horse program at their previous location, and he plans to bring his program here.”

“That’s good, right?”

“Assuming the people who were already doing horse therapy under the old manager are on board.”

“Speaking of the stable people, I went over there a couple of days ago to review the security system with them. I had written a program for the previous manager so the old cameras and the new ones they added on could all be viewed on one screen. It’s on a desktop system in the office in their house.”

“Did you get a sense of what they’re like while you were working with them?”

“They were both uncomfortable with the level of surveillance at the barn. I explained the problems at Christmas time that led to the enhanced system, and they said they understood; but they both said they were going to talk to the owners about backing off a little if things go well under their care.”

“I guess I can see how cameras everywhere accessible by the boss could be a little intimidating.”

“I told them the logs indicate the owners hardly ever access the files, but I don’t know if that helped any.”

The barista delivered Harriet’s drink, and she blew on it then took a small sip.

“I’m sort of glad we have this blanket-quilting project that will give us an excuse to visit the barn. I know Luke is almost an adult, but I’ll feel better if I see for myself that everything is going okay. Especially, as you were saying, in light of the troubles they had a few weeks back.”

“You can’t wrap him in bubble wrap.”

“I guess.”

“I wonder if Simon, the manager’s husband, will be making any modifications to the arena if he’s going to run the therapy program?”

“Why would he need modifications?”

“I guess you haven’t met him yet. He’s got some sort of disability. He uses an electric wheelchair.”

“That must uniquely qualify him to develop and run a therapy-horse program.” Harriet watched as people entered and lined up at the counter. “I guess a lot of people have the same idea as we did.”

“It’s because of this wacky weather. We’re supposed to be in one of the most temperate locations in the Northwest, if not the country, but suddenly, for the last two years, we’re having real winter.”

“And people are trying to say climate change isn’t real,” Harriet said with a chuckle.

“I guess our horse blankets will be timely.”

Harriet sipped her tea again. “I’ve been thinking about that.”

“And,” Lauren prompted when she didn’t say more.

“I haven’t come to any conclusions, but I’m trying to imagine what sort of design we can use. I’m thinking a patchwork background with some sort of appliqué in the hip area.”

“That sounds good so far.”

“It’s the appliqué I’m struggling with. A horse blanket is a functional quilt with a capital F.”

“Don’t they just put it on the horse right before the saddle goes on? That doesn’t seem too complicated.”

“It’s not the time the blanket’s on the horse I’m worried about. It’s when they take it off and toss it in the direction of the saddle they’ve just taken off, and then carry all their gear to the tack room.”

“That rules out ribbon embroidery and beads,” Lauren said.

Harriet sipped her tea latte and smiled.

“If your heart is really set on it, you could cover your embellishments with sheer netting.”

“Wouldn’t that flatten my fabulous work?”

“Not if you’re careful. Seriously, though, we need to figure out something that will be decorative but sturdy.”

Lauren leaned forward and tilted her head to the side to see out the front window.

“Is that your aunt’s Beetle that just drove in?”

Harriet turned and looked. By this time, the car was parked, and she could see her aunt climbing out of the driver’s seat and Mavis exiting on the passenger side. She waved when the pair came in, and they joined her and Lauren.

Beth took her hat off and ran a hand through her short white hair.

“If you two are going to be here for a while we could join you.”

“Go get your drinks,” Lauren said, “We’re waiting for Luke, who’s at a meeting at the stable.”

“What’s going on at the stable?” Beth asked when she’d returned with her coffee.

“Luke says the manager’s husband ran a therapy program at their previous location. He uses a wheelchair himself, so he has his own ideas about how it should be done, I guess,” Harriet told her.

Mavis brought her latte to the table and sat down.

“Have you guys figured these horse blankets out yet?”

Harriet set her cup down.

“We’ve been mulling it over. It seems like you’d want something decorative in the hip area, but it would have to be durable, since these are functional quilts.”

Aunt Beth blew on her coffee.

“That’s what Mavis and I were thinking. We can either do a complicated patchwork pattern or a simple appliqué.”

Lauren ripped at the edge of her napkin.

“That’s where we were ending up.”

“Since I’ve got access to Major whenever I need him, I was thinking I might try a few options,” Harriet said. “Just to get the basic shape and see how it fits when you add the quilting to the mix.”

“That’s a start, anyway,” Mavis said.

Aunt Beth mentioned that she’d run in to Freida from the Small Stitches, who was recovering from a broken leg she’d suffered during the Christmas holidays, which led to a thorough discussion of the troubles that had befallen the Small Stitches and how they were all recovering.

Chapter 3

Harriet and Luke had only been home for a few minutes when James came in, carrying a quilted hot-food carrier. He set it on the kitchen island and turned around to kiss Harriet.

“That smells really good,” Luke said with a grin.

“I’m not sure you can smell anything the way I’ve got it wrapped.”

Luke laughed.

“It’s going to smell good once you unwrap it.”

James unwrapped the covered pan.

“Tonight, we’re having pot roast, which was the special of the day at the restaurant. This being the after-holiday season and a weekday, things are very slow.”

Harriet put the pan in the oven and turned it on *warm*.

“I like pot roast.”

Luke laughed. “I like anything James makes.”

“Turn the other oven on to four hundred,” James told him. “I’m going to get some rolls from the freezer.”

Fifteen minutes later, the trio was seated at the kitchen table with their dinner.

“How was the meeting at the stable?” Harriet asked Luke.

“If they actually do everything they talked about, it should be great.”

Harriet briefly wondered if Luke would ever stop being so guarded. He’d seen so much disappointment in his young life.

James passed the basket of rolls to her.

“What are they planning?”

“The therapy program before was mainly for children. Now, they’re adding more adult programs, like for veterans. And Simon said they found out some of the people at the homeless camp are veterans, so he’s thinking of inviting any of them who want to come to participate.”

“Wow, do they have enough horses for that?” Harriet asked.

“I guess someone with farmland took in the horses that survived the fire at their previous place. They have a big trailer, and will bring the horses over when they need extras.”

Harriet set the basket of rolls in the middle of the table.

“That’s convenient.”

“Yeah,” Luke said around a mouthful of pot roast. “Simon has a contraption for helping paralyzed adults mount up. The horses from the previous place are used to having people hoisted onto their backs, he says.”

“Have you learned anything more about the quarter-sheet blankets we’re supposed to be making?”

Luke smiled. “Not really. I saw one, but it just looked like a funny-shaped saddle blanket.”

“Do you think Major would be willing for me to make samples and try them on him?”

“I think Major would love that. Especially if you keep bringing him carrots.”

“I can do that,” Harriet said with a smile.

“By the way,” Luke said after he’d eaten most of his first serving. “You probably already know this, but Raven is taking riding lessons and is volunteering with the therapy-horse program.”

Harriet set her fork down.

“I *didn’t* know that. I guess I didn’t realize she was interested in horses. Jenny hasn’t mentioned anything.”

“I’m pretty sure she wasn’t until her popular girlfriends started taking lessons.”

James cut a small piece of roast up into three parts and slipped them to the two dogs and Fred the cat.

“I wonder if Jenny and Brian will buy her a horse,” he said.

“Probably,” Luke said. “They buy her everything she asks for.”

James raised an eyebrow. “Is that a note of jealousy I detect?”

“Not even a little bit. I shouldn’t have said anything.”

“So, why did you?” Harriet asked. “You know you can tell us anything. Or, at least, I hope you know that.”

Luke sighed. “All I meant was since Raven went to live with Jenny and Brian, she’s been...I don’t know how to say this right.”

“Just spit it out, we won’t judge you,” James encouraged.

“You know how you guys wanted to buy me everything in sight at first? Only I kept saying no to most of it.” His face turned red. “You finally got the hang of it after a while. Well, Raven says yes to everything they offer and then some. She’s got a bigger wardrobe than anyone at school, they’ve bought her an electric guitar and a drum kit, a designer purse, three phones already, and two tablets, and a stereo system for her bedroom, which she says is decked out in all new furniture and designed by an interior decorator.

“I guess what I’m saying is, I think she’s taking advantage of them, big time.”

Harriet sat back in her chair and smiled.

“Don’t worry, Jenny’s got a handle on things. She says Raven is testing them. She doesn’t believe they could possibly care for her, and she believes showering her with possessions is equal to caring. Jenny thinks Raven is waiting for her to say no to something to prove her belief that they don’t really love her.”

“All she has to do is ask for something they can’t afford—an airplane or something, doesn’t she?” Luke asked.

Harriet twirled her fork between her fingers.

“It’s all complicated. Raven deliberately isn’t asking for anything out of financial reach, because she wants to believe Jenny and Brian love her. She doesn’t really want them to refuse her. But she keeps asking for stuff to reassure *herself* it’s true. Jenny believes she will eventually believe they care and stop asking for stuff. And she thinks it’s slowly starting to happen already.”

Luke got up and started taking dishes to the kitchen peninsula.

“By the way, if you want to volunteer with the therapy-horse program, especially the veterans’ part, since that will be new, the orientation meeting is next Wednesday at four.”

Harriet looked at James, and he smiled.

“I might just do that,” she said and smiled back at him.

Chapter 4

Robin McLeod, DeAnn Gault, and Lauren met Harriet at the stable the following Tuesday at nine. The weather remained cold and clear, so they all were clad in down jackets or vests and knit hats.

“Major will give us an approximation for our trial run although he’s a lot broader than the dressage horses. Wait here, and I’ll get him out of his stall.”

Robin pulled a folded piece of muslin from her bag.

“Is Major going to be bothered by four women hanging fabric on his backside and pinning in darts?”

Harriet chuckled.

“He’s a decorated veteran of the Seattle Police Mounted Patrol. He’s probably seen it all. He retired when he was stabbed, don’t forget. I’m not sure he’d flinch even if you stuck him with a pin.”

She turned and went down the aisle to Major’s stall, snapping on his lead rope and bringing him back to one of the side crosstie stations, so they wouldn’t block the main aisle. Robin pulled a yellow legal tablet and pen from her purse before setting the bag on a bench.

“Okay, I’ll take notes. When you pinch up a dart, measure how deep it is and how long it is. I made a rough sketch of what I think the blanket will look like.”

Lauren got her retractable tape measure from her messenger bag.

“We should measure the darts twice, and if the two measurements don’t match, we can do a tie-breaker.”

"I'm not sure it's quite that precise," Harriet said with a grin.



Robin flipped the top page of her tablet over the numbers.

"Okay, I'm going to swing by the Steaming Cup on my way to the Loose Threads meeting. Anyone want anything?"

Harriet and Lauren ordered drinks, and Robin and DeAnn took off.

"Do you mind if I brush Major a little before I put him back?" Harriet asked. "He was so patient with us, he deserves a reward."

Lauren rolled her eyes. "Do what you need to do."

Harriet pulled a bag of cut-up carrots from her pocket and fed a handful to the horse, and then spent fifteen minutes brushing him.



Harriet had just latched the door on Major's stall when a compact gray-haired woman led a tall dark-bay horse out of the stall next to his. The bay was favoring his left front foot. She led him a few lengths and then stopped, turning around and walking backward, trying to look at his foot.

"Would you like me to lead him so you can watch?" Harriet asked her.

"Thank you," the woman said, and handed over the leather lead strap. She smiled at Harriet. "I'm Stella Bren, and this fellow is Milo's Second Season."

"I'm Harriet Truman. The big fellow in the next stall in my son's horse Major."

Stella walked behind the horse, and Harriet led him the length of the aisle, turned and brought him back in a straight line.

Stella looked puzzled.

"He was favoring that foot a few weeks ago, but then it cleared up, and he was fine. We went to a show last weekend outside Seattle. He got two firsts. Everything was great, but now he's lame again. I don't understand."

"That *is* curious."

"I wonder if something's wrong with his shoe?" Stella lifted the foot up and looked at the bottom of the hoof. "I can't tell if anything is wrong."

Harriet looked. She didn't see an obvious wound.

"Maybe I should call the farrier," Stella said.

"I think I'd try the vet. He might have a navicular bone problem, or maybe a coffin-bone break."

"I don't know what I'd do if he went lame. We imported him from Germany and spent a fortune having him work with a trainer and learn his commands in English. It would be really hard to lose that sort of investment."

Harriet patted the horse's neck. "I wouldn't write him off just yet. See what the vet has to say."

"You're right. I shouldn't think so negatively. Thanks for helping me."

"You're welcome. I'll see you around."



Lauren looked at her watch as Harriet got in the car.

"You must have given that nag the full spa treatment."

"There was a woman trying to check her horse's injured foot. She needed someone to lead it down the aisle and back, so I helped her out."

"We're going to have to hurry."

"Are you afraid your drink will be cold?"

Lauren laughed.

"No, that's what microwaves are for. I'm worried we're going to miss all the best gossip."

"When have you known the Threads to only discuss a hot topic once? If they've got anything good, they'll still be dissecting it when we get there."

"Who was the woman you were helping?"

"I've never seen her before today. Her name is Stella Bren."

"Is she related to Milo Bren?"

"Possibly—the horse's name is Milo's Second Season."

"Milo Bren started a very successful software company. He made a lot of money and then suddenly dropped off the radar. There's been a lot of speculation as to what happened. Some think he had a mental breakdown, some think he has a terrible disease."

"What did you think?"

"I didn't think anything. His company stayed open; the new CEO is competent. Their stock has maintained its value, and they still hire me to do freelance work."

"Very interesting. That explains how they could afford to buy an expensive Warmblood horse in Germany and have it trained to learn English commands." She pulled her car to the curb in front of Pins and Needles. "Here we are."



"Do you want me to reheat your drinks?" Robin asked when Harriet and Lauren entered the classroom/meeting room inside the shop. "I kept them wrapped in a dish towel in the kitchen, but you could microwave them if they're not hot enough."

Harriet went in and got her London Fog latte.

"This is still plenty warm," she said and carried it into the classroom.

“Did we miss anything?” Lauren asked.

Mavis pulled her coat up over her shoulders and shivered.

“The only time anything happens in this town, you and your sidekick are in the middle of it.”

“So, let us ask *you*, did we miss anything?” Aunt Beth added.

“Geez, I was only asking,” Lauren said.

Mavis reached over and patted her hand.

“I’m sorry. I’m just tired of all this cold. I don’t need to take it out on you.”

“You might not be interested in my next announcement,” Harriet said, “but Luke was telling me the new stable managers are expanding the horse therapy program to include veterans and people from the homeless camp. They’re looking for volunteers.”

Aunt Beth pulled a piece of black wool from her bag, along with a sandwich bag filled with colorful wool circles and triangles. She took a threaded needle from the background and positioned a red circle before beginning to whipstitch it in place on the black wool.

“Do you have to be able to ride a horse?”

Harriet sipped her tea.

“I don’t think so. They usually have volunteers who walk along beside the horse and rider on both sides to keep them balanced. Someone also leads the horse. I think they have some clerical tasks, too. Checking people in for each session. I don’t know if they plan on offering food, but I’d assume if they’re bringing people from the homeless camp, they’ll feed them before they take them back.”

“They must have some sort of training for the volunteers, too,” Lauren added.

“They do,” Harriet said.

Jenny got out her quilt block and began stitching a green leaf onto a gray background.

“I’d like to have an excuse to spend some time at the stable. Raven’s out there almost every day, and I’d like to see what she’s doing.”

Lauren smiled.

“I like it— trust but verify.”

Connie took a cookie from a plate in the center of the table.

“I think Grandpa Rod would babysit Wendy if you want to come volunteer with me,” she told Carla Salter, the group’s youngest member.

DeAnn slipped her needle free from her quilt block.

“I’ll need to see the schedule. If they need help with daytime programs when the kids are in school, I could do that. Our nights are pretty busy with kid activities.”

“Same for me,” Robin said.

Marjorie Swain, the owner of the quilt store, came to the doorway.

“I heard you say you were making some sort of quilted saddle blankets for the horses at Miller Hill, and I thought I’d offer to sell you the fabric at cost as my contribution to the project.”

“Are you sure?” Mavis asked. “We can pay for our fabric.”

“I wouldn’t offer if I didn’t mean it, and besides, it’ll help me move fabric to make space for the spring stock.”

Harriet stood up.

“I’m going to go look at fabric so I can get started when I get home. I’m making a muslin template for fitting purposes.”

Lauren got up and carried her empty cup to the wastebasket.

“I’m fabric-shopping, too.”

Chapter 5

James came home early from the restaurant the next night so they could eat dinner before the volunteer meeting. He brought chicken breasts with mushroom gravy and rice pilaf with roasted root vegetables.

“I thought I’d come with you to the volunteer meeting. I can’t really spend time out there, but if they’re going to feed people when they bring the homeless and veterans in, I can help with that.”

Luke filled three glasses of water and carried them to the table before sitting down.

“Simon said he’s going to have Emily and me work with the horses that are coming from the other stable. He wants us to lunge them all before the therapy clients ride them.”

“What’s lunging?” James asked.

Luke looked at Harriet.

“You can explain it to him,” she encouraged.

“You put the horse on this long rope and hold a buggy whip and have it go in circles around you.”

“It’s a technique for warming a horse up,” Harriet added.

James took a roll from the breadbasket and handed the basket to Harriet.

“I guess I’m going to have to learn all the horsey lingo if I’m going to have two horse people in the family.”



The orientation meeting took place in the indoor riding arena at Miller Hill Equestrian Center. Emily Roberts met them at the door. She worked cleaning stalls to help pay the boarding fees for her horse, and she and Luke rode their horses together whenever they could.

“Hi, Luke,” she said with a nod to Harriet and James. “Can you come help me? Angela’s going to use Fable to demonstrate how we work. You and I will show what the volunteers do.”

He looked at Harriet. “Will you two be okay?”

“I think we can manage on our own,” she said with a smile. “You go ahead.”

Lauren was already sitting in the bleachers with Connie, Carla, Mavis, Aunt Beth, and Jenny when they climbed the steps.

“Come on in, glad you could make it,” Lauren said with a grin. “Apparently, we’re waiting for the van to arrive with the people from the homeless camp.”

“I hope it doesn’t take too long,” Connie complained. “It’s cold in here.”

Beth unfolded the blanket she’d brought to cover her legs with and handed Connie a corner of it.

“Here, I’ll share. We’re going to have to figure out a warmer outfit if we decide to volunteer.”

Harriet leaned forward so she could look past Lauren and down the row to her aunt.

“When you volunteer, you’ll be moving the whole time, so I don’t think you’ll have to worry. If you’re still cold, though, a trick I learned at boarding school in Switzerland was to wear tights or panty hose under my jeans. They aren’t as bulky as long underwear so you can still move around easily, but they’re warm as an under layer.”

“I’ll try it,” Connie said. “I rode horses on my uncle’s ranch when I was young, but that was in Mexico, so I didn’t have to worry about being cold.”

Their discussion was interrupted by the arrival of Jorge, followed by half a dozen residents of the homeless camp at Fogg Park, including the acknowledged leader of the group Joyce Elias. Jorge climbed the bleachers and took a seat beside James. Joyce and her friends sat several rows above Harriet and the Loose Threads.

“Were you thinking about feeding the veterans’ and homeless groups when they are here to do their therapy?” he asked.

“Something like that,” James replied.

“Great minds think alike, my friend.”

A few more people Harriet only recognized as having met in passing filtered in and took seats before Angela stepped out into the center of the arena, a microphone in her hand.

“Thank you for joining us this evening,” she began and, after welcoming them, described the program, emphasizing the changes there would be from the previous one. Her husband made a grand entrance, riding in on a vehicle that seemed to be a hybrid of a motorized wheelchair and a quad bike. Behind him walked four teen-aged girls, including Jenny’s foster daughter Raven. When Simon stopped his chair beside his wife, the girls arranged themselves around the chair like princesses at court; each with a hand on the side or back of the vehicle.

Harriet glanced at Jenny, who had a look of disgust on her face.

“What is he doing with those girls hanging off his chair like some sort of sultan with his harem?” Jenny said.

“Didn’t you ever have a crush on an older teacher?” Mavis asked her.

Probably not the right question to ask Jenny, who had spent her teen years in a commune, Harriet thought.

Connie tucked the blanket tighter around her knees.

“It could be the little-mother syndrome. He’s crippled, so they all want to take care of him.”

Lauren leaned closer to Harriet.

“Look at the way the blonde has her hand on his shoulder, stroking his hair. That doesn’t look motherly to me,” she whispered.

“I’m with you. Look at the way he smiles at them.”

Lauren shook her head. “Creepy.”

Emily led Fable out, and Luke followed, carrying a set of steps he set beside the horse when they’d stopped a few feet short of Angela.

Angela spoke about preliminary meetings the participants would have where they would learn how to groom the horse, how to walk around the horse, how to take care of it, etc. Only when they were comfortable with their mount would they begin to ride.

When she got to the part of the demonstration that involved riding, Emily mounted Fable using the stairs, and Luke led the mare. Two of the girls left Simon’s chair and moved to either side of Fable, each holding onto one of Emily’s legs while Luke led the horse in a slow circle.

“Okay,” Connie said, “I can do that.”

Luke brought Fable to a stop in front of Angela, and Emily dismounted.

“As people progress with their riding skills, they can eventually ride without people on either side, if they wish. No one is pushed to advance further than they feel comfortable.”

Luke picked up the steps and followed Emily as she led Fable out of the arena.

“Before we take questions, I’d like to introduce my husband, Simon Tavarious. He’ll be working with the children’s therapy group in the mornings, but you may see him helping with the evening groups occasionally.”

Simon wheeled his vehicle to her side, and she handed him the microphone.

“I hope you will all sign up to volunteer with our program. I think you’ll find it to be quite a rewarding experience.

“When we work with veterans, we have a meal after our riding session each week. If you would like to volunteer to help provide, prepare, or serve food, please meet with me after this meeting.” He handed the microphone back to his wife.

“Now we’ll break up into groups. Simon will talk to people who want to help with food, and then he’ll talk about his riding classes. He’ll stay in the arena. I’ll meet the therapy class volunteers by the entrance at the base of the bleachers. If you folks don’t mind waiting, I’ll meet with the people from Fogg Park when I’m done with the volunteers.”

Harriet heard Joyce Elias muttering. She thought she heard her say, “Where else would we go?”

She smiled. Joyce was an independent woman. It probably galled her that they would be dependent on the stable for transportation if they participated in the program. Joyce prided herself on her ability to bike or bus anywhere she needed to go. This was a situation where neither of those options was going to work for her.

Jorge, James, and three women went to the middle of the arena, while Harriet, Lauren and the rest of the people in attendance climbed down the bleachers and reassembled in the entrance hall. A stout blond woman walked beside Harriet.

“Hi, I’m Crystal Kelley, and that beautiful girl in the blue jacket beside Simon is my daughter Paige.”

“Harriet Truman,” Harriet said.

“Oh, I’ve read about you in the newspaper. Aren’t you the one who found Daniel hanging in the back of the Print Shop at Christmas time?”

“Sadly, yes,”

“Well, I always wondered about him.”

“Oh?” Harriet said.

“You know,” the woman said with a knowing smirk.

Lauren was walking on Harriet’s other side.

“Oh, you mean because he was gay, he deserved to be hanged?” she asked.

“That’s not what I meant,” Crystal said and shoved her hands in her pockets, speeding up so she was no longer beside them.

“That wasn’t very friendly,” Harriet said, trying hard to suppress a grin.

“She deserved it. Besides, I don’t have a kid who’s going to be riding with her kid.”

“Thanks, that helps a lot.”

“Admit it, you didn’t like her, either.”

Harriet shook her head. “It is not for me to judge.”

They reached the gathering spot, where Angela was handing out packets of information and taking people’s names and contact information. Lauren and Harriet pulled the pages out of their envelopes and reviewed them.

“It says here I need to wear riding boots of some sort, English or Western.” Lauren shook her head. “I’ve followed you into a number of interesting situations since you’ve moved back, but this one may take the cake.”

“Don’t knock the boots until you try them. You may find you like them.”

“That’ll be the day.”

If you enjoyed the sample, you need not stop there!

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