

# A Quilt in Time

A HARRIET TRUMAN/LOOSE THREADS MYSTERY



Arlene Sachitano





“I wish I could think of something we could do for Sarah that didn’t involve kidnapping or breaking-and-entering, but with her family so firmly in place, it’s going to be hard.”

“I got nothing, if we can’t bend the law a little.”

“Are you making any progress on your Pratt family background checks?”

“Howard seems to have had several ex-wives who are curiously dead before their time. I’m still digging on Seth, but I think he’s running an internet discount prescription drug business. Based on Connie’s suspicions, he may be getting his drugs from illicit sources, but I can’t make a direct connection on that yet. I’ll keep digging until I can prove it one way or the other.”

Fred came into the kitchen and meowed loudly.

“Don’t even try it. Aunt Beth told me she fed you at five o’clock. And she gave you some bites of sliced chicken as a treat, since you had to spend the day alone.”

Fred poked his nose in the air, swished his tail forcefully and left the room.

“He’s got an attitude prob—” Lauren was cut off by the kitchen phone ringing.

“Hello?” Harriet said. “Hello?” She flicked the speaker phone button so Lauren could hear the conversation and looked at the caller ID. “Sarah? What’s wrong?”

“Help me,” said a rasping voice. “Help me.”

The phone went dead.

“Come on.”



## 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*

### **The Harley Spring Mysteries**

*Chip and Die*

*The Widowmaker*



# A QUILT IN TIME

A Harriet Truman/Loose Threads Mystery



## ARLENE SACHITANO



ZUMAYA ENIGMA

2014

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 IN TIME

© 2014 by Arlene Sachitano

ISBN 978-1-61271-243-7

Cover art and design © April Martinez

All rights reserved. Except for use in review, the reproduction or utilization of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means now known or hereafter invented, is prohibited without the written permission of the author or publisher.

“Zumaya Enigma” and the raven logo are trademarks of Zumaya Publications LLC, Austin TX. Look for us online at <http://www.zumayapublications.com/enigma.php>

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Sachitano, Arlene, 1951-

A quilt in time : a Harriet Truman/Loose Threads mystery / Arlene Sachitano.

pages ; cm

ISBN 978-1-61271-243-7 (pbk. : alk. paper) — ISBN 978-1-61271-244-4 — ISBN 978-1-61271-245-1 (epub : alk. paper)

1. Quiltmakers—Fiction. 2. Abused women—Fiction. I. Title.

PS3619.A277Q8545 2014

813'.6—dc23

2014007522

**To Malakai, Amelia And Claire**

## Acknowledgments

Thank you to everyone who supports my writing process, from the idea phase through the work of writing and the never ending promotional activities. My friends, family and business associates. I'd like to especially like to thank Jack and Linne Lindquist for hosting me in their booth, The Craftsman's Touch, at many large quilt events. Thanks also to Deon and Rich Stone-house at Sunriver Books and Music for our annual event.

Domestic violence is a serious subject and I've made every attempt to base my story in fact and to that end researched the subject before starting my story. Any errors are my own. The memory retrieval in my story is based on research I found on the Internet. The research is in its early phase and may or may not work as easily as I portrayed it or at all.

As always, many thanks to Liz and the team at Zumaya Publications for all the work they do on my behalf. Thank you, too, to my brilliant cover artist April Martinez.

Last but not least, thank you to my spouse Jack, our children and our children's children.



# Chapter 1

Lauren Sawyer set her messenger bag next to the wing-back chair as she sank into the seat.

“I can’t believe I’m sitting in your quilt studio at o-dark-thirty on a Wednesday morning and I don’t even know why.”

Harriet Truman kept a tea and coffee setup on a library table opposite the entrance and reception area of her long-arm quilting studio. However, she’d moved the cream and assorted sweeteners to the smaller pie-crust table that sat between the two upholstered chairs when she saw Lauren coming up the driveway.

Lauren scooped a heaping spoonful of sugar into her coffee cup.

“I’m not sure even coffee with sugar is going to get me through this...” She waved her hand. “...whatever kind of meeting it is.”

“Aiden said it was important,” Harriet poured hot water over the tea-bag she’d put into her mug and sat down in the other chair. “That’s good enough for me.”

“That’s big of you, all things considered.” Lauren looked at Harriet over the edge of her cup as she sipped.

“I’m giving him the benefit of the doubt. He’s going to counseling, which is a big step for him. He and the counselor decided he needs to take one thing at a time. First, he’ll deal with his sister and all her baggage; his brother’s going with him for support on that one. After they’ve sorted that out, we’ll work on *our* relationship. In the meantime, the counselor says it’s okay if we see each other, as long as we keep things superficial for now. No decisions or big talks.”

“Aren’t we just the grownup in the relationship...oh, wait, you *are* the grown-up. How much older than him are you? Nearly old enough to be his mother?”

“Oh, stop,” Harriet swatted at her across the table. “You know very well it’s ten years. And it’s too early for you to be poking at my insecurities.”

Lauren blew across the surface of her coffee and took another sip.

“You’re safe for now.” She pointed to the window. “Someone else just pulled in.”

Mavis Willis, who at seventy-one was the oldest member of the Loose Threads, came through the door a moment later.

“I hope you have coffee on.”

“Right here,” Harriet said and indicated the carafe on the table between her and Lauren.

“You *are* going to tell us what this is all about, aren’t you?” Mavis asked.

She poured a cup of coffee as Harriet got up and let her have the more comfortable chair, sliding over one of her rolling worktable chairs for herself.

“I was just telling Lauren I’ve told you everything I know, which is nothing. Aiden just said to ask everyone to get here early because he wanted to ask something of us, and he had surgery starting at eight.”

“You know, honey, your aunt Beth wouldn’t be offended if you reupholstered these two old chairs now that you own the studio. She didn’t like this floral when she bought them secondhand twenty years ago.”

“She’s welcome to do any upholstery projects on my behalf she wants to, but I’ve got bigger fish to fry right now.”

Lauren and Mavis didn’t get to hear what those fish were because Robin McLeod and DeAnn Gault came in followed by Connie Escorcia and Harriet’s Aunt Beth.

Harriet was glad to see Robin—she was a stay-at-home mom and part-time yoga teacher, but she kept her license to practice law current just in case a need arose among her friends and family. It was to be hoped her skills wouldn’t be needed this morning, but since Aiden hadn’t told Harriet anything, it was nice to be prepared.

Connie took off her coat and draped it over the back of another rolling chair, moving it into the circle. She shivered and rubbed her hands together.

“I’m having flashbacks of the early-morning staff meetings at the grade school,” she said. “I never understood why the fourth-, fifth- and sixth-grade teachers got the afternoon meeting time just because their kids were older

than ours. By the way, Jenny isn't going to be here. She's meeting with family in Lynwood."

"I don't envy her those discussions," Mavis said and shook her head.

"They've been estranged for so long, you wonder if everyone might be better off letting it be," Connie suggested.

"If I were them, I'd want to reconnect, no matter how painful it might be at first," Beth said.

"Are we going to be doing any stitching while we're here?" DeAnn asked. "I took the boys to early drop-off at school, and my mom took Kissa for the whole morning, since we weren't sure what was going on."

"I don't have anything pressing for the morning, so everyone's welcome to stay and stitch if they want," Harriet offered. She knew everyone in her quilt group would have at least one hand-stitching project in her purse or in a bag in her car.

Robin looked like she was about to speak when Aiden arrived. He took his fleece jacket off and tossed it toward an empty chair as he strode over to the coffee carafe.

"I hope you ladies didn't drink all the coffee," he said as he tilted the container. "Carla's right behind me. She was doing a drive-by at the coffee shop to get Wendy a hot chocolate. I offered to do it for her, but she told me she was the housekeeper and I was the boss and left before I could argue."

"That was bold of her," Lauren said.

"She's getting real cheeky," He looked around the circle of women. "I'm guessing that's thanks to the influence of you all." He stirred sugar into his cup then stepped into the middle of the circle of chairs to address the group, who were now all sitting with coats off, leaning forward with coffee mugs clutched in their hands.

"You're probably wondering why we're here," he started. "And by the way, thanks for coming so early. I'm sure Harriet told you I'm scheduled for several surgeries this morning.

"When my mom died, I inherited a bunch of stuff, including her charitable foundation. There's a board of directors that oversees the choosing of charities, follows up to see how the money we donated is used, etc., and there are also a couple of paid employees who handle the day-to-day responsibilities. But at the end of the day, I have to say yea or nay on where the money goes."

Carla came in, interrupting Aiden's speech.

"Sorry," she said and slid her daughter Wendy off her hip and onto the floor, shrugging off her own jacket in one smooth move. She handed the

little girl the foam cup of hot chocolate she'd been holding and sat in the chair Aunt Beth slid toward her.

"Abuela," Wendy cried in delight when she spotted Connie. Connie held out her arms and Wendy went to her, smiling as her substitute grandmother pulled her into her lap, shushing her as she did so.

"As I was saying," Aiden said and pretended to give Carla a stern look, failing when he couldn't chase the laughter from his eyes, "I do have a say in what charities get money from the foundation. I usually just approve whatever the very competent board chooses. What I'm here to talk to you all about is that I've personally identified a need in our community and am planning to fund the solution."

"Since we're not your very competent board, could you just cut to the chase and tell us what you want?" Lauren interrupted.

"Okay." Aiden rubbed his hands together as he paced across the space within the circle of chairs. His brow furrowed as he thought. "It's come to my attention that some battered women in our community are reluctant to come to the shelter because they can't bring their pets with them."

"That seems a little harsh," DeAnn said.

"The shelter often takes women with children," he continued. "Some of those kids potentially could have asthma or allergies that would preclude living with pets." He looked at DeAnn. "Like you, I thought that was a little harsh. I happen to think that pets are an important part of most people's support system. Pets are also on the front lines in a home when abuse is taking place. The sooner the pet can get out of the home, the better off it is, too."

"So, you want to build a shelter for the animals?" Lauren asked.

"Yes, but not like you're thinking. I want to add a kennel behind the existing house. Complete with a 'family room' for socializing with the animals and letting them have some normal time with their owners.

"For the safety of the residents, it needs to have a secure connection to the house, so we'll build it with an air-shower and positive-pressure entrance so the animal dander won't be transferred to the main residence. It will all be enclosed in heavy chain-link fencing, carefully made to not look like a prison."

"That sounds pretty cool," Harriet said.

"Where do we come in?" Aunt Beth asked.

"Like most shelters, they have a pretty tight budget. As a result and, again, like many shelters, they let civic groups 'adopt' or sponsor various public rooms at the home. The volunteers have to be carefully vetted so as to not compromise the residents' safety also.

“Enter the Loose Threads.” He spread his arms wide. “I was hoping you might want to make quilts for both the pets as well as some larger ones for the residents to use in the social room, and any other homey touches you can think of. I’ll pay any expenses, of course.”

“After it’s all set up, would we have an ongoing obligation?” Lauren asked.

“Lauren,” Mavis scolded, tilting her chin down and looking over the top of her half-lens reading glasses. Being the oldest member of the quilting group made her the unofficial sergeant-at-arms.

“It’s a good question,” Aiden replied. “And no, you’re under no obligation at any point. Most groups do take on the maintenance of their room, but what that entails varies depending on what room they ad-opt.”

“I think it’s a wonderful idea,” Aunt Beth said. “We can make quilts for the people beds, too.”

“Whoa, let’s not get ahead of ourselves,” Lauren cautioned. “Some of us work for a living. And even if my computer business is from home, I still have to put in the hours.”

“You don’t have to do anything you don’t want to,” Mavis gave Lauren “the look” again.

“I think it’s a great idea, too” Carla said. “It really meant a lot to me when I got my baby quilt from the young mothers’ quilting group when I was pregnant with Wendy.”

“Sure,” Robin added. “And I can make people quilts, too.”

“When will the room be done?” DeAnn asked.

“They’re breaking ground this week on the addition.”

“We better get busy, then,” Beth said and stood up. “Shall I make another pot of coffee or shall we switch to tea?”

“How many pets will you be accommodating?” Harriet asked Aiden while the others told Beth their drink preferences.

“The shelter is intended for six women, but they have a loft space that’s approved for several more beds, so I’m planning on six indoor-outdoor dog runs, the same number of small animal enclosures, and an eight-foot counter with heat lamps and plug-ins for really small customers.”

“That sounds pretty deluxe.”

“The foundation can afford it, so why not? I want it to feel like home, not an upscale hotel and not an institution. I’m hoping you and the rest of the Threads can help me keep it personal.”

“You know who you need to talk to?”

“I know you don’t think a lot of me right now, but I do know who the best architect in this area is, and I wouldn’t let my project suffer because of any feelings I might have about Tom and his relationship to you.”

Harriet held her hand up in a peace gesture. The other Threads looked everywhere except at her and Aiden.

“I’m sorry, my bad,” Aiden said. “We’re supposed to be keeping it light. Let me rephrase. Tom is the architect we’re using to build our very green, very environmentally pleasing animal facility.”

“Good choice,” Harriet said and walked away.

“Thanks, everyone.” Aiden raised his hand in a half-wave as he headed for the door. “Gotta go.”

“We’re happy to help,” Connie told him.



Harriet and Connie rearranged the chairs, placing them around the large work table while everyone refreshed her drink and Mavis pulled out a bag of oatmeal raisin cookies she’d kept hidden until Aiden was gone.

“I was afraid the young doctor would see these as a distraction, since we weren’t sure how serious this meeting was going to be,” she confessed and bit into a cookie.

“I don’t know what anyone else is thinking,” Aunt Beth said as she took her place at the table while Mavis passed the cookie bag to Connie. “But for the pet blankets, I still have a lot of dog-print fabric left over from when we were trying to figure out our quilts for the dog adoption benefit last fall.”

“Maybe we should divide into two groups,” Harriet suggested. “Some people could make as many pet blankets as they can and the other half could work on a couple of lap quilts.”

“That would be a start,” Robin said as she reached into the cookie bag. “We should probably see if they’ll allow us to tour the place and assess. Aiden told us what they need for the pet room, but maybe there are other, greater needs we should be aware of.”

“I guess it *would* be bad if we made fabulous pet quilts and the children were using tattered rags to sleep with,” Lauren said.

“I’m sure that’s not the case,” Robin shot back, “but we need to be certain.”

“So, what’s appropriate for a women’s shelter?” DeAnn asked. “Do we go with soft and soothing or bright and hopeful?”

“I don’t think there’s a single scheme that applies to all people in this situation,” Aunt Beth suggested. She rubbed her chin as she spoke. “I’d imagine women with young children might want something practical and perhaps more colorful. Older women or those who don’t have children might want something more soothing.”

“I like Robin’s idea of at least one or two of us going to meet with whoever runs the place,” Harriet said.

“In the meantime,” Carla said, “maybe we could make some sets with a large quilt for the parent and smaller quilts in the same color-way that could be for the kids.”

“I like that,” Connie said. “Then the rest of us can get started while our representatives go gather information.”

“Good idea,” Mavis agreed.

They spent the rest of the morning planning quilts and dividing up the tasks. Robin, Harriet and Lauren would set up a meeting as soon as possible with the shelter director. Afterwards, they would all meet at Pins and Needles, Foggy Point’s best and only quilt store.

## Chapter 2

**H**ave you ever been to a woman’s shelter?” Lauren asked Harriet and Robin as they sat around a table at the Steaming Cup coffee shop. The shop was divided into function areas—tables and chairs in the center of the room, several groupings of upholstered chairs and small sofas around the perimeter, and a long computer table sporting electrical sockets every two feet down the center near the third wall.

Harriet had her hands wrapped around her mug of hot cocoa.

“I haven’t,” she admitted.

“Unfortunately, I have. Before the kids were born, when I was working fulltime, I represented more than one victim of domestic violence, so, yes, I’ve been to shelters before,” Robin said. “Not here, though. It was back in my Seattle days.”

“What should we expect?” Harriet asked.

Robin leaned back in her chair and pressed her lips firmly together in thought.

“They’re all different, depending on what sort of building they’re in. Some were made to be a group facility from the get-go, others were adapted. But they also had some things in common. To function, the house has to be very organized, and they’re security-conscious to a degree that will probably feel paranoid to you. Believe me, it’s necessary.”

Harriet sipped her chocolate.

“Our tour guide will tell us how many people are staying there, right?”

“She’ll give us some general information and will let us see a representative room or two. The resident who occupies it will have removed any iden-



tifying pictures or other information that would let you know who they are.

“I don’t know if they do that here in Foggy Point, but in Seattle they took no chances. Anyone who came past a semipublic visiting room had to have a criminal background check and references. And, Lauren, no wise cracks. They’ll throw us out at the slightest hint that we’re there for other than our stated purpose.”

“Okay, Mom, I’ll behave.” Lauren rolled her eyes upward then looked to Harriet for support. Harriet gave a small shrug but didn’t say anything.

“Everyone done?” she asked a few minutes later. She took the three mugs and returned them to the collection tub near the counter.

“Where to now?” Lauren asked Robin.

“We meet the assistant director downtown, and she’ll take us to the shelter. As we suspected, they don’t let people drive up and park by the front door.”



“Okay, in all our scenarios, I never imagined we’d be going to a large apartment building,” Lauren whispered to Harriet as their host, Georgia Hecht, drove into the below-ground parking lot under the blocky beige sixties-era apartment building. She used a passkey to open an iron gate across the entrance. “Where will they keep the pets?”

“Don’t worry,” Georgia answered. “This isn’t the shelter. This is the smoke and mirrors. We rent parking spots from the landlord, who also allows us to use a rather obscured entrance to our property.”

They followed Georgia into the building’s laundry room through a door at the back of the garage and on the same level. When they were all inside, Georgia looked carefully around before pulling a keychain from her pocket and selecting a key, which she then slipped into the lock on a door that appeared to lead into a utility closet.

“Close the door behind you,” she ordered when they were all inside the small space. “It’s a tight fit for four people, but we don’t open the exit door before closing the entrance—ever.”

Harriet did as directed, and Georgia pulled a shelf full of cleaning supplies toward her. It was hinged on one side and swung open to revealed a short passageway with another door at its end. Georgia peered through a peephole in the second door before using a different key on the same keyring to open it. She stepped aside and made a sweeping gesture with her arm, indicated they should precede her.

The quilters found themselves in a room dominated by a garden workbench. The air smelled of earth and plants and the sort of oil used to lubricate yard tools.

“You can go on out into the yard,” Georgia directed. “Once the door out of the laundry room is locked, we’re safe.”

Robin led the way out into a forested back yard.

“Follow the path into the back yard and wait for me on the deck,” Georgia called after them as she turned to lock the door.

“I like it,” Lauren said with a smile.

Harriet looked around the property, trying to imagine how it would look in satellite view on a map as they made their way toward the house. The house was well obscured by large, old-growth trees; someone had put a good deal of thought into this location. Sticks and flags marked the perimeter of what must be the new animal addition, and there was freshly turned earth at one corner.

“The house is on what was once a flag lot,” Georgia explained when she rejoined them. “We planted an arborvitae hedge behind the front house, which we also own. The hedge goes across the old driveway, so from the front you’d never know a second house was back here.”

“Like that guy in California who kidnapped the girl and held her in his back yard for eighteen years?” Lauren asked.

“That was unfortunate, but, yes, even parole officers couldn’t find her, and they visited on a regular basis that whole time. Our situation is one hundred and eighty degrees from that one, but with luck, our house will never be discovered by anyone who isn’t welcome.”

“Thank you for letting us come tour. Hopefully, the new animal facility will help ease the journey for your residents with pets,” Robin said.

“We appreciate the generous donation from Dr. Jalbert and the foundation. It will mean the world to the woman who live here.”

“Our group is hoping to make a few bed quilts for you, also, if that’s appropriate,” Harriet added.

“Let’s go inside,” Georgia said and headed for the back door. “Dr. Jalbert has vouched for you, so you’re free to tour the entire house. I’ll show you around, and you can get an idea of what our needs are.”

“That will help,” Robin told her.

They waited while she unlocked the door and led them across a screened porch. She stopped to unlock the door into the house, and Harriet noticed the porch’s screening was more heavy-duty than normal—another security measure, she assumed.



Georgia split them up for the tour, sending Harriet and Robin with residents and showing Lauren around herself. When they'd finished looking at the facility, she escorted them back out through the apartment building and drove them back to the downtown office.

Robin had suggested they not talk about what they'd seen until they got to Pins and Needles. Even Lauren was sufficiently sobered by what she'd seen to not argue.

"Did somebody die?" Marjory Swain asked from her post behind the cash register when Harriet, Robin and Lauren entered the quilt store.

Lauren only stared at her, her pale face whiter than usual.

"We just got back from a tour of the women's shelter," Harriet said as she slid out of her coat. "Come back and listen if you have a minute. I don't know about the others, but I'm not sure I can give my report twice."

The Loose Threads were sitting around the table in the larger of the two classrooms at the back of the store; hot drinks, bits of fabric, threads and pincushions littered the surface in front of them.

"The coffee and water pots are hot in the kitchen," Beth told them.

"Carla brought apple and cherry turnovers," Connie added proudly. "She made them herself."

"Connie showed me how." Carla's cheeks pinked at the compliment.

Robin, Lauren and Harriet fixed cups of tea and settled in vacant chairs at one end of the table. They looked at each other and then at the expectant faces of their friends.

Finally, Harriet began.

"I'm not sure what Robin and Lauren expected, but I was unprepared for what we saw."

She picked up a scrap of fabric from the table and twisted it in her fingers. Mavis took her plastic rain hat from the top of her quilting bag and began absently folding it into increasingly smaller triangles. Connie rhythmically stirred her tea, although Harriet knew she was drinking an orange-spice blend and had added neither cream nor sugar.

"Before you ask, the facility is well hidden and probably meets all the city codes for form, fit and function. That said—by necessity, according to our host—most of their funds went into providing security for the residents. The interior is colorless, industrial and bare-bones. The individual rooms have wood-frame beds and dressers like they have in college dorms, army surplus blankets, and white towels and bedding from a hotel seconds store."

“Díós mio,” Connie said as she dropped her spoon with a clatter and put her hands to either side of her face. “Those poor babies.”

“It’s hard to imagine how they build much hope in the women and their children,” Robin agreed in a grim tone.

“Even their computer is an antique,” Lauren lamented. “How are they supposed to find jobs and start new lives with that sort of equipment?” She shook her head. “I expected the facility to be grim, but the part I wasn’t ready for was the condition of the women themselves. Two of them had just arrived and were covered in bruises. One woman had a split lip that was so swollen she couldn’t talk clearly, and another had a cast on her left arm up to the elbow.” She shivered.

Harriet picked up the story.

“All of them had visible scars. My tour guide said the emotional scars are even worse. A lot of them are conflicted about being there. They’re so used to being controlled by their abuser, and they’ve been isolated from their friends for so long, it’s hard for them to help themselves, much less each other.”

“Someone is doing art therapy with the children, so the kids have decorated their rooms with their drawings, but that’s just about the only color in the place,” Robin added. “And it ends up being more sad than uplifting.”

“Sounds like we’ve got lots of opportunities, ladies.” Mavis dropped her crumpled rain hat into her bag. “What do you think?”

“We can make the dog blankets Aiden asked for, but I’m thinking those bland rooms do need some quilts,” DeAnn said.

“The children definitely need quilts,” Connie said. “And probably matching pillows.”

“Do the bedrooms have windows?” DeAnn asked.

“Yes, each room has a window,” Robin answered. “But the house was made to be a shelter home, so the windows are clerestory style—above eye level. Their main purpose is to let light in, so curtains wouldn’t work. The kitchen and bathrooms could use them, though, if that’s what you were thinking.”

“I can give you gals a good discount on fabric and batting,” Marjory said, leaning against the doorjamb where she had a view of the cash register. “If you can use anything from the sale shelf, I’ll give it to you at my cost.”

“Thank you,” Aunt Beth said. “That’s very generous of you.”

“I’d like to make a quilt, too. When you decide on a plan, let me know what I can do.”

She straightened as the front door bell jangled, summoning her to the shop floor.

“I’ll check with Pastor Hafer and see if he’d be willing to ask the congregation if anyone has any spare bedroom furniture in good condition they’d be willing to donate,” Beth said.

“So, what is the actual breakdown?” DeAnn asked. “Do we know how many rooms they have and how many are occupied?”

“They gave us a summary sheet,” Harriet answered. She scanned the paper she’d been given. “Looks like they have six resident rooms plus an attic loft they’d like to put two more beds in. There are five women and four children in residence right now. Two woman have one school-age child each and another has two younger children.”

“I’d like to make children’s quilts,” Carla volunteered.

“Mavis and I can handle the pet quilts,” Beth looked at her friend. “Like we said the other day, between us, we have a piece of every dog-print fabric ever made.”

“I’ve got a couple of cat prints, too,” Mavis added. “So, we’re good to go on that. Beth and I could make some simple curtains for the bathrooms, too. We could do muslin with colored trim that would coordinate with the bed quilts.”

“We can make lap quilts for the...what did Aiden call it? The socialization room?” Beth asked. “Animal prints should be fine for that.”

“That sounds good,” Connie said. “I can start a bed quilt when I finish making the adult bibs for the senior home. They’re having an open house in two weeks, and I wanted to have one for each of the residents who uses one. I found a cute pattern that looks like a shirt or blouse front and completely covers the person’s real shirt. Unless you look close, you can’t tell they’re wearing anything other than their regular clothes.”

“Aren’t there a lot of people who need them?” Lauren asked. “That’s going to be a big job.”

“I was going to talk about this when we were finished discussing the quilts for the shelter.” Connie reached into the canvas bag sitting by her feet. “I brought copies of the pattern in case anyone wants to help.” She set a stack of printed pages on the table in front of her. “I just found out about it at church yesterday. Diana was talking to Sarah’s mother about how ratty the bibs they have look. I guess her mom lives there. Sarah’s mom, Elaine, said they spent a lot of money building the new wing and that the stained bibs are functional. One thing led to another and...”

“...and you volunteered to replace all the bibs?” Lauren asked. “Seriously?”

Connie looked around at her friends.

“What could I do? Would you want your loved one to be sitting there with a stained rag around their neck when the whole community troops past their room during the open house?”

“Still.” DeAnn joined the discussion. “That’s a lot of work to take on at such short notice.”

“Isn’t the senior center where Rod’s aunt lived before she died?” Robin asked. “I thought Rod said you weren’t happy with them.”

“Is that why you volunteered?” Lauren asked, her eyes bright with excitement. “Are you going undercover?”

“That’s not a good idea,” Robin cautioned. “If you have some reason to believe there was anything suspicious about the way Rod’s aunt was treated, you need to hire an attorney or go to the authorities, depending on what you’re thinking happened.”

“I like it,” Lauren said. “Count me in. Harriet?” She looked at her friend.

“I’m not playing private eye, but I’d be happy to make some bibs.”

“Me, too,” DeAnn offered.

“If they’re not too hard to make, I can try,” Carla said.

“You can work with me,” Connie told her. “I’m sure you’d be fine on your own. They’re pretty simple. But it will go faster if we work together, and Rod can keep Wendy busy.”

In the end, everyone took a bib pattern and committed to making a few.

“Now that the bibs are taken care of, let’s get back to the shelter quilts,” Harriet said. “Carla is going to make baby quilts, Aunt Beth and Mavis are going to make the pet covers and lap quilts for the new room. Connie will make a bed-sized quilt. I can make another bed quilt. Anyone else?”

“I’ll do a bed quilt, too,” Robin volunteered.

Lauren raised her hand without saying anything.

“I’ll make one, too,” Marjory said from the doorway, where she was sweeping threads from the floor. “If that’s okay with you all.”

“Of course,” Harriet said.

“Put me down for one,” said DeAnn.

“Maybe we can get Jane Morse and some of our other friends who sew to make pillow cases to coordinate with the quilts,” Beth suggested.

“We better get busy,” Harriet stood up. “Did you get any information about what sort of fabric we should use for the bibs?” she asked Connie.

“Let me show you.”

Connie pulled Harriet’s copy of the pattern out of its plastic sleeve. The rest of the quilters gathered around.

## Chapter 3

Harriet stopped the long-arm quilting machine when she heard a knock on her studio door. Aiden came in as she grabbed the knob to open it. He brushed past her and stormed into her work space.

“Come on in.”

“Something’s wrong,” he blurted. He spun around to face her.

“You want to tell me about it? Sit down.” She pointed to one of the wing-back chairs and then went to sit in the other one.

“It’s Rachel,” he said, crossing his legs and bouncing his foot then uncrossing them again.

“Rachel?”

“Sarah’s cat.”

Harriet let her breath out, having briefly feared he was about to confess some previously unknown transgression that had come out in his weekly therapy session.

“What about her cat?” She got up and poured a cup of coffee from the thermal carafe on the library table then pressed it into his hands.

“Drink this,” she said.

He sipped it and began again.

“I think Rachel is being abused.”

“Oh, Aiden, I can’t believe that. Sarah may be many things, but she loves that cat.”

“I know that. I don’t think it’s her. That’s why I’m here. I think Sarah herself is a victim of violence.”

Harriet leaned toward him.

“What makes you think that?”

“She brought Rachel in this morning with a broken leg and a story about the cat trying to jump on the counter and slipping. She said she fell wrong when she hit the floor.”

“Cats don’t fall wrong, do they?”

“It’s possible, I suppose, but a young healthy cat like Rachel? Not likely. And falling from the height of a kitchen counter it’s *really* not likely. Fortunately, it was a clean break and should heal without complication. When I told Sarah that, she asked if Rachel could stay at the clinic until her leg healed. I told her it wasn’t necessary and that I couldn’t just keep her there. Then she started crying and asked if I knew of anyone who could take her into foster care.”

“Wow.”

“Her tears washed some of her makeup off, and she was covering up a black eye. I took a good look at her then and realized she didn’t look like herself. Her clothes were baggy—she’s lost a lot of weight. I asked about it, but she denied it.”

“What did she say?”

“That everything was fine. I asked if I could help her, suggested she call the domestic violence hotline. I asked if I could call anyone for her. I told her I could get your aunt or Mavis to come pick her up.”

“She wouldn’t go for any of it?”

“Nope. She said she was fine, that she just needed a place for Rachel. I agreed to keep the cat for a couple of days to see if we can find someone, but Rachel is clearly the least of her problems.”

“She has been pretty withdrawn from the group lately. And now that you mention it, Lauren thought she saw bruises on Sarah’s neck a few months back. We’ve all tried to reach out to her, but she’s not having it.”

“Do you know her boyfriend?” Aiden set his cup down on the pie-crust table.

“She’s been very secretive about him. She lives at his cabin most of the time, but several of the Threads have dropped in unannounced and no one has ever caught him there. She’s always alone.”

“Are you sure he exists?”

“Jorge has seen him. He says he’s a good-looking smooth talker. Sarah hasn’t talked much about him with any of us, as far as I know. She says general stuff—how smart he is, and how successful—but nothing specific. And it’s been a while since she’s even done that.”

“I don’t want to be overly dramatic, but I think your friend is in trouble. As part of our continuing education program at the clinic, we’ve had two



training sessions put on by the Humane Society on the topic of domestic violence toward pets, and that's just since I've been here.

"They told us that people who abuse and/or kill people often hone their craft on neighborhood pets. It was kind of creepy. The speaker said the police figure if they vigorously pursue these people while they're in the animal phase, they may be able to prevent them from escalating. We vets are supposed to be the front-line offense."

"I tried to tell Sarah once things wouldn't get better without her getting help, but I could tell I wasn't getting through. She would only talk about the cat. Listen, let me talk to my aunt and Mavis and maybe Robin. They'll have ideas about what we can do."

"Thanks." Aiden set his barely touched cup on the table and stood up. "That's all I can ask."

"How are *you* doing?" Harriet asked. Before she thought about what she was doing, she stood, too, and slipped her arms around his waist. He put his around her shoulders.

"No one said therapy would be easy, and it isn't." He sighed. "My therapist tells me things will get better. And he keeps telling me to eat, rest and exercise a little."

"Sounds like good advice. I'm glad you're doing it."

"If this is what it takes for us to be us, it will be worth it. I never said I was going to enjoy the process. Especially the part where we can't really be together."

Harriet was silent.

"I know, we can't talk about it. I better go. I've got appointments. I just wanted to get you and the Threads on the job with Sarah."

She laughed. "Thanks, I think."

"Let me know what you find out and what you decide to do."



Robin shook the rain from her jacket and put it on the back of her chair before she sat down at the big table in the back room at Tico's Tacos.

"DeAnn said to tell you she got your message and she'll be late because she's got playground duty this week at lunch time."

"I know it was short notice for everyone," Harriet said from the doorway, "but Aiden stopped by my place on his way to work this morning, and I didn't think this could wait."

Aunt Beth and Mavis arrived a few minutes later, followed by Connie and then Carla. Jorge brought baskets of warm tortilla chips and bowls of red and green salsa.

“Are you going to let us in on the mystery?” Aunt Beth asked.

Harriet pulled the door shut and joined them at the table.

“Sorry, but this isn’t the sort of problem that can be discussed over the phone. Lauren said she’s coming. I was hoping to wait until everyone got here before I go into it.”

“Lauren’s present. Are we taking roll call?” She came in and shut the door behind her before sitting down across from Harriet. “I take it from the locked door that we’re telling secrets on someone.”

Harriet stood up.

“Aiden stopped by this morning with some disturbing information,” she began. “Sarah brought her cat into the clinic with a broken leg she said was from a fall. Aiden doesn’t believe it—he thinks the cat is a victim of domestic violence.”

Connie sat straighter in her chair.

“Sarah would never hurt that cat,” she said.

“Hold on,” Harriet told her. “He didn’t say he thought Sarah hurt the cat. He thinks Sarah is also a victim. She was trying to get someone to foster Rachel, and when Aiden said he couldn’t take her, she started crying and when her makeup ran, he could see she had a black eye.”

“Díós mio.”

“She *has* been acting weirder than usual for months,” Lauren said and popped a chip into her mouth.

“And you said you saw bruises on her neck that one time, too,” Harriet reminded her.

“I did. It looked like someone had choked her. She tried to cover it but her scarf slipped.”

“How could we have missed this?” Aunt Beth leaned back and massaged her temple with her fingertips.

“She hasn’t been around for us to miss anything,” Robin reminded everyone. “Pulling away from friends is typical of women who are experiencing domestic violence.”

“Is it the woman pulling away or the abuser keeping her away?” Carla asked.

“Good question.” Robin turned to her. “I’m no expert, but in the cases I’ve dealt with, the abuser usually isolates his victim from all support systems so the only information she’s getting is from him. He can tell her she’s worthless, and there’s no one to contradict him.”

“That’s what my mom’s boyfriend did.” Carla twirled a strand of her long dark hair around her finger. “He used to hit her, too, but it was because she’d argue with him and make him mad.”

“Carla,” Robin said firmly, “let’s be very clear, here. It is never okay for a man to hit a woman. Or any adult to hit another adult, for that matter. It doesn’t matter what your mom did or said. It was *not* okay.”

“Okay,” Carla whispered, her cheeks hot and pink.

“This is important,” Mavis added. “I know you’ve had a rougher life than most of us can imagine, but it’s important you understand this. Violence is never okay as a response to anything in a relationship.”

The group was silent until Jorge came in with a handful of menus.

“Anyone need one of these? Or do you all know what you want?”

“Do you have a special today?” Harriet asked.

“Indeed I do. I have two pork tamales with a chicken enchilada, and I have chicken avocado soup.”

The group ordered one or the other of the specials, except Robin, who stuck with her customary salad. Jorge spoke to his waitress before taking the menus and leaving. A moment later, she returned with three heaping bowls of guacamole.

“Back to Sarah,” Harriet said when the door was closed again and the group was alone. “First, can anyone take Rachel? Second, how can we help Sarah? Anyone?” She looked around the table.

“Curly and I can take her,” Mavis volunteered. “My dog hasn’t met another animal she doesn’t like.”

“Okay, so what are we going to do about Sarah?” Harriet pressed.

“Do we have to do anything?” Lauren leaned forward and scooped dip onto her chip.

“Of course we have to do something,” Mavis said. “How would you like it if you were in trouble, and we just sat around eating chips and ignoring your distress?”

“I think we both know I wouldn’t be in that kind of trouble,” Lauren shot back.

Robin stood up, pacing behind the chairs as if they were a jury.

“You might be surprised to hear that many victims of domestic violence are otherwise independent, intelligent women. It can happen to anyone.” She turned and paced back to the end of the table and faced her seated friends. “I think our first step is to establish that she is, in fact, a battered woman. We’re just assuming she is.” She held up one hand and ticked off her fingers with the other. “Number one, her cat is injured. Number two, we’ve seen bruises. Number three, she’s withdrawn from her social support network. Anything else?”

“I think that covers what we know,” Harriet said. “So, what do we do?”

Mavis looked at Beth.

“Beth and I could talk to her when we talk to her about me taking Rachel.”

“How soon do you think you can do that?” Harriet asked, looking from her aunt to Mavis.

“She should be working,” Mavis said. “We can go after lunch.”

“What if she admits her boyfriend is beating her?” Lauren asked. “What then? She’s not coming to live with me, I can tell you that. Two days with that woman, and I’d probably hit her myself.”

“It’s really sad, but that used to be the standard prosecutors used to determine if they were going to go after abusive men. If fifteen minutes with the defendant made them want to hit her, they wouldn’t take the case to court,” Robin told them. “And that wasn’t that long ago.”

“We can guess she’s not going to agree to leave her boyfriend just because a couple of us tell her she needs to,” Lauren said.

Robin sat down again.

“I could go by and offer her legal advice,” she said.

“She probably doesn’t have anywhere else to go,” Harriet said. “One of my quilt customers is living in her old apartment. Unless she got a new one, she’s probably staying full time at that cabin.”

“I wonder if they have room at the shelter,” Mavis said.

“They were talking about putting some beds in their attic space,” Harriet said. “Plus, I think they have one empty private room. I could call Georgia and ask. I need to take measurements for the bathroom curtains we need to make, so I have to call her in any case.”

Jorge backed into the room, followed by his waitress, both of them laden with plates of steaming food, ending the conversation for the moment.

Harriet took a deep breath.

“This smells so good,” she told him.

“All for the pleasure of the lovely mujeres.”

Jorge smiled, set down his armload of plates, and left the room, returning quickly with a large tray of plates and bowls. The waitress set a pitcher of iced tea and a stack of glasses in the middle of the table.

“Do you need anything else right now?” he asked, looking from one end of the table to the other.

“Thank you, I think we’re good,” Harriet said.

Conversation ground to a halt as the women focused on their meals. Eventually, Connie put her fork down and leaned back from the table.

“I can’t eat another bite,” she said.

“Me, either,” Harriet concurred. “Let’s talk about where we are with Sarah. Mavis and Aunt Beth are going to go see her about taking her cat

and will try to get her talking about her own situation, maybe suggesting she needs to make a change. Is that correct?"

Mavis and Beth nodded.

"I will check and see if the empty room at the shelter is, indeed, available, and whether, at first glance, they think Sarah qualifies. I'll tell Robin, and she'll go see Sarah and ask if she would like her to provide any legal services to help her get away from her abuser. She'll also talk to Sarah about going into the shelter."

"I'm taking the bibs we're making to the seniors at the end of this week," Connie said. "When I called Sarah's mother to arrange a time, she invited all of us to the open house. If we haven't gotten through to her individually by then, maybe we can talk to her as a group."

"Sounds like a plan," Lauren said.

Carla cleared her throat then coughed.

"If Jorge *has* seen Sarah's boyfriend, maybe he can tell us something about him." She swiped at a lock of hair that had fallen over her eyes.

"Oh, honey, that's a great idea," Mavis said.

"I'll be right in," Jorge's disembodied voice said over the intercom.

"It creeps me out when he does that," Lauren said. "He knows we forget he has that thing." She pointed at the speaker mounted near the ceiling.

"I heard that," Jorge said as he came in. "Just remember where your favorite guacamole comes from, missy." He tried to sound mean but burst out laughing at the end. He pulled out a chair and sat down near the middle of the table, then leaned forward before speaking in a quiet voice.

"I have learned some information about the señorita's boyfriend, and it is very troubling."

The women waited to hear what came next.

"She is dating her brother."

"What?" said Lauren loudly.

"Shhh," warned Jorge, pointing at the intercom speaker again. "Not her *brother* brother. They share no blood, but his father is married to her mother, and they lived under the same roof for a time."

"That complicates things," Harriet whispered.

"No joke," Lauren whispered back.

"We still need to try to reach her," Connie said. "Even if there's every probability that she'll refuse our help and tell us to mind our own business. I couldn't live with myself if something happened to that girl and we could have prevented it."

Mavis put her coat on and picked up her purse.

“We’ll just have to make sure it doesn’t come to that.”

“We’ll let you know how it went when we have the cat settled at Mavis’s,” Aunt Beth said as she hurried to gather her own coat and purse and follow her friend out the door.

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

[Buy Now - Amazon](#)

[Buy Now - B&N](#)

Check [www.zumayapublications.com](http://www.zumayapublications.com) for other retailer links.

