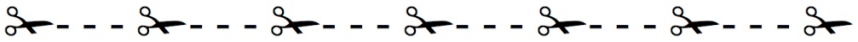




# Crazy as a Quilt

A HARRIET TRUMAN/LOOSE THREADS MYSTERY

Arlene Sachitano





## “Dr. Jalbert Isn’t Going Anywhere,” Said A Deep Voice From Behind Them.

Harriet started, dropping her purse. She looked over Aiden’s shoulder as he clutched her tighter. A bright light was shining in her face. She could see several dark forms beyond the light but couldn’t tell who or what they were.

“Ma’am, I need you to slowly move away from Dr. Jalbert. And both of you keep your hands where we can see them.”

She did as she was told, and as she moved out of the glare, she could see the man was a uniformed police officer, and he was holding a large gun pointed in her direction.

“There must be some mistake,” she protested, unable to stop herself from spouting the cliché that most people in this situation said.

“No mistake, ma’am. You aren’t in any trouble. Move over to Officer Nguyen.” He pointed with his free hand.

Why is it always Officer Nguyen? she wondered. There must be two dozen officers on the Foggy Point Police department, but any time she crossed paths with the police it was Officer Nguyen.

She looked at Aiden.

“Do what he says,” he told her as he held his hands away from his sides and in the air where everyone could see them.

When Harriet reached Nguyen, the guy with the gun rushed up to Aiden and grabbed his right wrist, snapping a handcuff onto it in one smooth motion, quickly pulling his left hand down and back and cuffing it, too.

“What’s going on?” Harriet asked Nguyen.

He didn’t answer.

## 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*

### **The Harley Spring Mysteries**

*Chip and Die*

*The Widowmaker*





# CRAZY AS A QUILT

A Harriet Truman/Loose Threads Mystery



## ARLENE SACHITANO



ZUMAYA ENIGMA

2015

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

© 2015 by Arlene Sachitano

ISBN 978-1-61271-282-6

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>

**To My Favorite Knitter**



# Chapter 1

Spring had arrived in Foggy Point, Washington, and nowhere was it more apparent than at Pins and Needles, the town's best and only quilt fabric store. Gone were the snowflake prints and snowman figurines. Easter bunnies, fuzzy chick candles, stuffed animals and ceramic figurines adorned the shelves. Pastel florals were on display in the front window in coordinated groupings with prints, stripes and solids.

The Loose Threads quilt group, in the larger of the two classrooms at the back of the store, sat around a table stacked with plastic-wrapped bolts of fabric.

"Does anyone need anything?" Harriet Truman called from the small kitchen next to the room. When no one answered, she joined her friends in their examination of the fabrics.

Lauren Sawyer stood and leaned to the center of the table, picking at the edge of the plastic on the nearest fabric bolt. The bundle appeared to be some sort of muslin backing fabric.

"This must be for the crazy quilt workshop."

"That's correct," Marjory Swain, the store's owner, said from the doorway. "They asked me to bring in backing fabric and some basic moiré colors."

Carla Salter, the group's youngest member, pulled the plastic off another bolt.

"What's mwa-ray?"

"That's the watery-looking pattern on the colored fabric," Harriet's aunt Beth explained. "When they were first invented, moirés were all silk, but now they're made from cotton and even synthetic blends."



“Thank heaven,” Connie Escorcía added. “Cotton is a little more affordable and also much easier to work with.”

“Did they give you a supply list?” Marjory asked. “The organizers asked me to bring in the moiré and backing, but they didn’t tell me anything else about what you all might need. I assumed they’re supplying some of the fabrics.”

Harriet pulled a folded paper from her canvas project bag and handed it to Marjory.

“Assorted pieces of ten different fabrics—velvet, satin, silk, rayon, etc.—in a variety of colors and prints. One or more ten-inch squares of each fiber,” she read, scanning the list. “Pieces of silk or satin ribbon and a variety of laces.’ Wow, they expect a lot.”

“I called the number at the bottom of the page to ask,” Robin McLeod, the group’s resident yoga teacher and a semi-retired lawyer told them. “The person who answered said some of the teachers will have kits available, and one of the ladies is bringing a lot of hand-dyed lace and ribbon for us to buy.”

Harriet took a sip of her tea.

“That’s good, but it sounds like a field trip to Seattle is in order.”

Marjory handed the paper back to her.

“I don’t know if it will help, but some of you may remember that this shop was geared toward dressmaking when I bought it. I sold off as much of the old inventory as possible, but I had a fair bit of bridal and prom dress fabric left. It’s such nice material I couldn’t bear to get rid of it, so I stuck it up in the attic. You all must have seen it when you were up there during the storm. In any case, I could give you a real good deal on that if you think it would work.”

Harriet looked around the table at her fellow workshop-goers.

“That sounds good to me. Can we go up and look when we finish our meeting?”

“Sure. Carla, if you can watch the register a few minutes before everyone’s finished, I can go up and pull the bolts out onto the table up there.”

Lauren pulled a stack of fabric strips, a portable cutting mat, ruler and roller cutter from her bag and set them on the table.

“I’m a lot less worried about the crazy quilt supplies than I am about the out-of-town quilters we’re supposed to be hosting. Whose idea was that, anyway?”

Mavis Willis, the Loose Threads’ oldest member, got her hand-piecing project from her bag. She was stitching diamonds of Civil War fabric into Lemoyne Stars for an opportunity quilt at the Methodist church.

“I think the Small Stitches came up with that one.”

“I told them we didn’t have room,” DeAnn Gault said. “I gave up my sewing room when we adopted Kissa. I can’t imagine anyone would want to stay with a house full of kids, anyway.”

Lauren sighed. “I didn’t have a good excuse, so I’m going to have to put up with some stranger invading my space for a week.”

“You could have said no,” Aunt Beth pointed out.

“My landlord’s mother-in-law is a Small Stitch, so, no, I couldn’t. Edna is well aware that I have a three-bedroom apartment.”

Harriet pulled her own project from her bag. She was embroidering a Christmas wreath on a square of off-white flannel.

“It could be worse. I *know* the person who’s coming to stay with me.”

“How did you pull that off?” Lauren asked.

Harriet put her hands to her face then swept her short dark hair back.

“This is not a good thing. I’m telling you. My past is coming back to haunt me. The wife of my husband Steve’s best friend called and asked to stay with me.”

Carla looked up from the binding she was sewing onto a baby quilt.

“Does it make you sad to see people from before he died?” Her face turned pink as she finished speaking.

“No, no, it’s not that at all. It’s complicated.”

Carla looked down at her hands.

“I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have asked.”

“No, sweetie, it’s okay. When my husband died, it turned out he’d been keeping a big secret about his health from me. The sad part is, he didn’t have to die. His condition was treatable. Since he chose to never tell me about it, I have no idea why he didn’t seek treatment or if I could have changed his mind about that decision.

“Since I’m not from California, and Steve was, most of our friends were his friends, and it turned out they all knew about his condition.”

DeAnn stirred a packet of sweetener into her coffee.

“Wow, that must have made you mad.”

“It did. Over time, I’ve accepted it was his decision, not his friends’. They were just respecting that decision.”

“Yeah, but still...” Lauren said.

“Exactly. Which is why I’m not looking forward to having Sharon in my house for a whole week. For a few days, I can avoid having to talk about ‘the subject,’ but a week? I think not.”

Lauren started measuring and cutting small squares.

“Hard to believe she’d want to stay with you. I mean, for that reason.”

“Yeah, that’s what I thought, but it is what it is.”

Aunt Beth uncovered a plate she’d pulled from a paper bag sitting on the table.

“This coffee cake is an experiment, so don’t be afraid to speak up if you don’t like it.” She pushed the plate to the middle of her end of the table. “All I know about my roommate is she’ll be able to climb stairs.”

“And mine won’t,” Mavis said. “I told them my place would be good for someone less mobile. My son even made a ramp I can put over the front porch step if I need to.”

Carla glanced up again from her binding.

“Aiden said we could host someone, but I don’t know who we’re getting.”

“Oh, honey, that’s nice,” Mavis said and patted Carla’s knee.

Connie went to the kitchen and came back with the hot water carafe.

“Anyone need a warm-up?”

Robin raised her hand, and Connie went around the table to pour.

“Rod and I will have a pair of sisters—I told them we could take two people. They said they were coming in from Colorado and Texas and were hoping to be near each other.”

“Well, you can’t get much closer than that,” Beth commented.

“On a slightly other subject,” Lauren said with a smile. “I ran into Tom Bainbridge in Angel Harbor last week. Guess who’s bringing a collection of crazy quilts to display at the workshop?”

Harriet lowered her forehead to the table.

“Oh, great,” she said without looking up.

Lauren’s smile broadened.

“Think of it this way. With all the romantic tension between your two men, you won’t have time to worry about your house guest.”

“You’re not helping,” Aunt Beth scolded.

Lauren shrugged.

Harriet sat up and sighed.

“Can this week get any worse?”



Harriet straightened and rubbed her low back.

“This is a real treasure trove.” She held up a strand of velvet ribbon from a bag on the attic floor. “This whole bag is velvet and satin ribbons, and the one beside it is cotton lace. Most of it is white or off-white, but we can dye it.”

“You should look at these satins,” Aunt Beth said from a table on the other side of the attic. “There are some pretty beiges and pinks.”

Lauren looked up from the bolt of wine-colored velvet she was unfolding.

“You aren’t going to go the traditional route?” she asked Harriet. “I figured your quilt would be all black and navy and wine.”

“I’m going to wait to make a decision until I see all the materials we have available.” Harriet rerolled the ribbon she was holding onto its spool. “I was telling Aunt Beth that if it’s possible, I’d like to try making a lighter-colored quilt.”

Carla unfolded a section of bright pink velour from a bolt she was holding in her arms.

“Are there any rules about color?”

Aunt Beth looked up from her satins.

“Honey, if you like that pink, I’m sure there will be a place for it in your quilt. I think the only rule is that there are no rules.”

Lauren set her bolt on the pile the women had selected.

“Keep telling yourself that. If there weren’t rules, we wouldn’t need to take a week-long workshop on how to make these things.”

Harriet picked up an armload of bolts and headed for the stairs. She paused and looked back at the group.

“I’ve got to go home and take Scooter out before Aiden brings his niece Lainie by.” She and veterinarian Aiden Jalbert had been dating off and on since they’d both returned to Foggy Point the previous year.

“So, are you the new nanny or something?” Lauren asked.

“No, their mother is visiting. Again. I’m not sure what kind of custody arrangement Michelle has with her ex, but she and her kids are here along with a tutor and a real nanny. Lainie asked Carla to teach her to quilt, and Carla passed her off to me.”

Carla pulled the bolt of pink fabric to her chest and cleared her throat.

“I could have showed her what I do, but I think she needs to get away from her mother sometimes. Did I do something wrong?” She dipped her chin to her chest so her hair fell across her eyes.

“No, honey,” Aunt Beth said, “you did the right thing. Being the housekeeper, you see what goes on every day in that house. If you think the girl needs a breather, I’m sure you’re right.”

Carla set the fabric on the table and came over to Harriet.

“Michelle is saying all the right things, and she’s being her version of nice to me, but she’s not good with the kids.”

Harriet shifted her armload of fabric and put her hand on the younger woman’s arm.

“Aunt Beth’s right—you did the right thing. I’m happy to help Lainie learn to quilt and to give her a break from her mother.”

Carla’s shoulders relaxed. Lauren stepped over and patted her on the back.

“You did good. We’ll make a full-fledged Loose Thread out of you yet.”

“She’s kidding,” Harriet said before Carla could react. “You *are* a full-fledged Thread. I better go. If you guys decide to go to Seattle to buy more supplies, let me know.”

With that, she eased her way down the staircase with her fabric.

## Chapter 2

Aiden's niece and nephew were playing with his dog Randy on the front lawn of the large Victorian home he'd inherited when his mother had passed away a year earlier.

"Harriet," they both called as she got out of her car. Randy beat them to the driveway and started bouncing on her back legs, her front feet grazing Harriet's thigh. She reached down to stroke the dog's head, but the kids took it as an invitation to a group hug and almost knocked her over in their enthusiasm.

"Slow down, everyone," she said as she regained her balance, hugging both kids as she did so.

"*Controlez-vous,*" said a voice in French from the porch. A gray-haired woman stood ramrod straight, her arms folded across her navy blue-cardigan-clad chest. Her thin lips were pressed together, and she shook her head. "Mademoiselle Avalaine, go get your coat and bag, don't keep Ms. Truman waiting," she continued in accented English. She turned to Etienne. "Go inside and wash your hands."

She gave Randy a disgusted look, turned and went back into the house. Harriet looked down at the dog.

"What did you do to her?" she asked.

Carla came out the back door before the dog could answer. She stood at the top of the stairs.

"I guess you met the nanny."

"She's a real delight. Is she always that friendly, or is it me she doesn't like?"

Carla swept a strand of her long dark hair behind her ear and looked down at Harriet.

“She’s like that all the time. Except when the kids step out of line, that is. Then she’s worse.”

“That’s awful.”

Carla came down the back porch steps and joined Harriet.

“Tell me about it. I feel sorry for the kids. At least Wendy and I can escape to our rooms. They’re stuck with Madame all the time except for her half-day off on Sunday.”

“Do you think they’d let Etienne come quilt?”

“Oh, no, it’s not manly enough. She’s real old school, and Michelle lets her do whatever she wants.”

“I’ll see if I can figure out something for him.”

“Do you want to come inside and wait?” Carla asked.

“Not really, but I guess I should.” Harriet locked her car and followed Carla into the house.

“Harriet, thank you so much for agreeing to teach Avalaine to quilt,” Michelle said. She was sitting at the kitchen table, a cup of coffee in one hand and a pencil in the other. She set the pencil down on a folded segment of newspaper. “I was just trying to finish the Sunday *Times* crossword puzzle.”

*Who cares?* Harriet thought, but she didn’t say anything.

Michelle took a long sip from her cup.

“Did Carla tell you that one of my friends is going to be staying with us while she goes to the workshop you all are going to?”

“She mentioned that Aiden had agreed to host someone.”

“It was amazing.” Michelle set her cup down on her newspaper, leaving a wet ring on her crossword puzzle. “It could have been anyone, and it turns out it’s an old friend of ours.”

“That is amazing,” Harriet said.

“Maybe you and your aunt can come over for dinner and meet her when she arrives. She’s coming a few days early so we can visit before your program begins.”

Harriet would rather have been trapped on an iceberg with a hungry polar bear.

“That sounds nice,” she said.

She and Michelle were never going to be friends, but the woman was Aiden’s sister; and now she was getting involved with Michelle’s children. If Michelle was willing to try, so was she.

Avalaine came into the kitchen carrying her jacket and a small backpack.



“I brought a notebook and a pen. Do I need anything else?”

“That sounds perfect,” Harriet told her and headed for the door. “Bye all.”



“When you’re making a quilt, one of the most important skills you need to develop is accurate cutting. For example, if you have six squares in a row on your quilt top, and each one is one-quarter of an inch off in size, what will happen?”

Lainie’s brows pulled together as she thought.

“Are they too big or too small or some of each?”

“Good question,” Harriet replied. “For our first example, let’s say they are all a quarter-inch larger.”

Lainie’s lips moved as she counted. Her eyes got big.

“That row would be an inch and a half longer than it was supposed to be.”

“What happens if the blocks in the next row are all a quarter of an inch too small?”

“Whoa, that row would be an inch and a half smaller. When you tried to sew them together they would be three inches different from each other.”

“Good,” Harriet told her and smiled. “You’d notice if your blocks were a quarter of an inch too big or small. If you had twelve blocks and they were only an eighth of an inch off, you’d have the same problem, but it would be harder to spot until you finished.”

“Or a sixteenth of an inch with twenty-four blocks.”

“You get the idea. In real life, what you asked first is more typical. Some blocks are a bit too big and others a bit too small so they can cancel each other out. But the truth is, it’s best to cut your fabric pieces as accurately as possible. We have plenty of tools to help us do that.”

Harriet spent the next half-hour showing Lainie various rulers, cutting guides and roller cutters. She had just started to demonstrate the suction cup handle used to hold bigger rulers when they heard a knock on the studio door. Aunt Beth and Mavis entered. Lainie’s look of relief was unmistakable.

“Have you been working this poor little thing to the bone?” Mavis asked. She set her bags down by the door and came over to Lainie, put her hands on the girl’s shoulders, and began massaging.

“I might have gotten a little carried away.”

“A little hard work never hurt anyone,” Aunt Beth observed.

“It’s really interesting,” Lainie said. “I had no idea it was so complicated.”

“I’m sure Harriet here is a wonderful teacher,” Mavis agreed, “but how about a little break so you can digest what you’ve learned.”

The smile on Lainie’s face was all the answer they needed.

Mavis went back to the door for her things. She held up a white paper bag.

“We swung by Annie’s on our way here, and she’d just put out a batch of cinnamon twists.” Mavis looked at Lainie. “Annie makes the best cinnamon twists, bar none.”

Beth looked at her friend.

“If you’ll stop talking and bring them in here, the girls might get to taste them while they’re still fresh.”

“I’m coming,” Mavis said and headed for the kitchen. “I just wanted to educate her on the finer points of pastry in Foggy Point.”

Harriet fixed tea for herself, Mavis and her aunt and poured a glass of milk for Lainie. They ate in silence until each of them had consumed their first twist.

Lainie wiped her hands on her napkin and took a drink of her milk before speaking.

“Do you like my mom, Harriet?”

Harriet choked on her sip of tea. Aunt Beth reached over and put her hand on Lainie’s arm.

“Honey, your mother has had a difficult year. Your grandmother died, and your mother has had trouble dealing with that.”

Mavis picked up the story.

“Sometimes people do things we don’t like, but that doesn’t mean we don’t like that person. We don’t like what they did, but we can still like them. Does that make sense?”

“I guess so,” Lainie said, all the while looking at Harriet.

“She’s right. Your mom has had a tough year, but the important thing is that she’s getting help.” Harriet passed her the plate of cinnamon twists, ending the inquisition. She was glad the girl had waited to ask the question until a time when her aunt and Mavis were with them. “Let’s have one more twist, and then we can get back to cutting out your first quilt.”

Lainie smiled at her and bit into a pastry.



“I think we have enough squares cut that you can start laying out your design next time.”

Another hour had passed. Harriet was starting Lainie on a simple lap quilt made from six-inch squares cut from a combination of solid and print fabrics; she’d let her pupil choose the material from her stash.

Lainie tilted her head to the side and looked at Harriet.

“How will I know what squares to put where?”

Harriet went to her desk and pulled a pad of grid paper from a drawer then picked a plastic mechanical pencil from a ceramic cup on her desktop. She handed everything to Lainie.

“When you get home, you can draw your quilt on this paper and then color the squares with crayons or colored pencils. You can try out different arrangements to see which one you like best. If you want, you can take a scrap of each of the colors to remind you what we cut out.”

“I can put the colors wherever I want?”

“Yes, you can. That’s the great thing about quilting—you can make whatever design you want.”

“Cool.”

“Let me find you a bag to put your supplies in.” Harriet went to a storage cupboard and rummaged around until she found a canvas bag with her company logo on it. “Here we go.”

She handed the bag to Lainie.

“Why did you name your business Quilt as Desired?”

“I didn’t,” Harriet explained. “My aunt started this business, and she named it. She told me lots of people get frustrated by quilt patterns that tell them how to put the pieces together to make the quilt top but don’t give any hints about how to quilt it. The patterns say to ‘quilt as desired.’ She thought that would be a good name for her business.”

Lainie sat on one of the wheeled chairs and put her pad, pencil and fabric scraps into the canvas bag.

“Your aunt is cool. She said nice things about my mom even though I can tell no one thinks my mom is a good person.”

“Has something happened? You seem pretty worried about what people think about your mother.”

Lainie spun her chair around, avoiding eye contact.

“Carla picks up Wendy and takes her out of the room any time my mom comes in. And she won’t speak to my mom except to say ‘yes, ma’am’ and ‘no, ma’am’. And Uncle Aiden’s jaw twitches when she talks to him. He says normal things to her, but his voice never sounds happy.”

“Sweetie, everyone understands that your mother was sick. It’s just that sometimes it’s hard to pretend something never happened, especially if it was something that scared you. Your uncle Aiden loves your mother, and he’ll keep talking to her until he can do it with a happy voice again.”

Lainie jumped up and threw her arms around Harriet.

“You’re the best.” A smile lit up her face.

Harriet hugged her then rubbed the girl's back.

"I think things are going to get better from now on. You can stop worrying about your mom and start worrying about something important—like who is your favorite music group this week or what are you going to wear now that you don't have to wear a school uniform every day."

"Did you have to wear uniforms at your boarding school?" Lainie asked.

The ensuing discussion lasted until Harriet pulled to a stop at Aiden's back door. Carla leaned into the open window when Lainie was back in the house. She held the receiver to Wendy's baby monitor loosely in her left hand.

"So, you're telling me I have to be nice to Michelle?" she asked when Harriet had related her conversation with Aiden's niece.

"I didn't say that. But it was sad hearing Lainie ask if we all hated her mom. She's a sharp kid. I decided I'm going to make a better effort to accept Michelle."

"As long as Michelle keeps her hands off Wendy, I guess can try," Carla offered.

"Do the kids say anything about their father?"

"Not much, but..."

"What?"

"I shouldn't say anything if I don't know for sure."

"Come on. If I'm going to be spending time with Lainie, I need to know if you think something's going on."

Carla's expression became serious.

"Don't tell anyone I said anything."

"I can't promise that, but I won't tell anyone something they could use against you. How's that?"

"It's not that big a deal, I just don't need any more trouble than we've got here already. I'm pretty sure Michelle's husband has moved on."

"Wow, that was quick, if it's true. What makes you think so?"

"Well, first of all, when Michelle was going off the rails, the kids were with their dad full time—I heard Aiden say he didn't want Michelle to have any visitation. I guess the dad was quite vocal about it. He talked about having Michelle's parental rights terminated. Now, the kids are here with the nanny and the tutor, and he's the one arranging visitation."

"That might have been a court decision. They're both lawyers, after all."

"There's more. He bought a new car. He used to drive a big sedan the kids could fit in with all their stuff. Now he drives a Porsche Nine-eighteen Spyder. I didn't even know what it was; I had to look it up on the Inter-

net. And the last time he came here, a pair of women's sunglasses was hooked on the passenger seat visor."

"I don't suppose they could have been Lainie's?" Harriet asked.

Carla stared at her.

"I guess not, huh? Well, that is an interesting twist on things. It's especially interesting since Michelle always complained about how poor they are. That's why she was trying to get Aiden to give her money all the time. Now, her husband can buy a car that, if I'm not mistaken, costs well into the six-figure range."

"I'm sure he has money she doesn't know about it. My mom always hid money from her boyfriends. We hid our escape money in my doll."

"If the car is his, I'm guessing Michelle's husband hid his escape money in the Cayman Islands."

"I feel sorry for the kids. Now nobody wants them."

"Their mom is getting better, and their uncle Aiden loves them. Plus, they have their uncle Marcel and his family."

Carla twirled a strand of her dark hair.

"I still feel sorry for them."

"Well, for as long as they're here, I plan to do my best to give Lainie some quality one-on-one time. I'll think about what we can do for Etienne, too."

"I guess that's all anyone can do. I better go check on Wendy. She fell asleep in the playroom, and if I don't wake her up pretty soon, she's going to want to party all night when she does get up."

Harriet smiled. "Good luck with that. Are you going to be able to come to lunch at Jorge's tomorrow? We're supposed to talk about our visitors and what, if anything, we'll do as a group apart from the workshop."

"Wendy has playgroup at the church, so that should work."

"See you then."

Harriet drove away, deep in thought about Lainie and her quilt project.

## Chapter 3

Connie picked up a glass from the side table in the back room at Tico's Tacos and filled it with iced tea.

"I don't understand why that woman would want to stay with you after everything that happened." She came back to the table and sat opposite Harriet. "Didn't you say you weren't on friendly terms when you left California?"

Harriet stirred a packet of sugar into her own glass of tea.

"I wouldn't put it that way, exactly. We were never friends to begin with. Steve had a group he'd gone to high school with. When they all got back from college and were working, they took up where they left off, and all us partners were along for the ride. The men went to football and baseball games together, and we women joined them for group meals. We barbecued or went to the theater in smaller groups, but always still in a group.

"A couple of the wives had gone to the same high school, and I'm sure they did things together without the guys, but the rest of us didn't. We were all too different. Steve's friend Jason had four kids in three years, so his wife rarely got out of the house. Sharon was still modeling back then, so she was always off to LA for this, that, or the other photo shoot.

"Niko went back to Japan and married the girl his parents had picked out for him shortly after his birth. To their surprise, they fell in love after he moved her here. She was nice, but she spoke little English, which made it hard to exchange heartfelt secrets.

"Anyway, when Steve died, and I found out they'd all known about his condition, I pulled away from them. They didn't exactly fall all over themselves offering help or anything, but the few who did I ignored."

“I still don’t see why you have to host one of them,” Connie said.

“I can’t believe she wants to stay with me. I’m assuming it’s out of a misplaced sense of guilt. I could be wrong, though. And I’ll admit I’m curious.”

Lauren had arrived while they were talking. She plopped her bag on the bench beside Harriet and pulled out her tablet computer.

“Want me to see what she’s been up to in the intervening years?”

“Yes,” Connie said at the same time Harriet said, “No.” Harriet looked at Connie.

“Okay, I guess I *am* a little curious.”

Harriet spelled the full name for her friend.

Lauren’s fingers tapped the face of her tablet.

“Oh, wow.”

“What?” Harriet asked.

Lauren was silent while she continued reading and scrolling.

Connie put her hand over her heart. “The suspense is killing me. What have you found?”

Lauren clicked and scrolled for another moment.

“First of all, when she was modeling, she went by the name Charin, spelled C-H-A-R-I-N. And it looks like your friend suffered quite a career reversal. She was in a terrible car accident, and according to this, it may have been her fault. One of her legs was badly scarred. Not a good thing for a model.”

“Were other people involved?” Connie asked.

Lauren turned back to her tablet and read some more.

“It says here that her passenger was another model, and she was also injured bad enough they airlifted her to the hospital. The other car held a mother and her two kids.” She clicked to the next page. “One of the kids suffered a spinal cord injury; it doesn’t mention the second child.”

“Was she drunk?” Connie asked.

“No. It sounds like the other car came through an intersection at the end of a yellow light, and Harriet’s friend was looking at her phone. The court decided they both were to blame. The press crucified Charin, though—I’m guessing because she was a celebrity as opposed to any determination of greater liability.”

Harriet sipped her tea.

“Great, that’s all I need. Someone else with issues.”

Lauren put her tablet to sleep and put it back in her bag.

“Maybe she figured you two outcasts could bond over your ostracism.”



“Let’s hope not. Speaking of bonding with strangers, have you learned any more about *your* roommate?”

“Rumor has it she’s a former nun.”

“*Diós mio*,” Connie said.

“What have I missed?” Robin asked as she breezed into the room, picking up a glass for tea as she passed the side table. Aunt Beth and Mavis came in before anyone could respond.

Connie slid over to make room for the new arrivals on the bench.

“We should wait to talk about our guests until everyone is here.”

“You’re no fun,” Lauren said, but her smile softened the complaint.



“What do you all think about having a mixer Friday night when our guests have arrived?” Aunt Beth asked when everyone was present and Jorge’s server was delivering their lunches.

Jorge entered with a basket of warm chips in one hand and a pitcher of lemonade in the other.

“Anyone need a refill?” He looked around the table. Harriet held her glass up, and he came to her spot. “This is a first.”

She looked up at him. “What?”

“The entire group is eating the same meal.”

“What’s not to like about fish tacos made with halibut?” Deann asked him with a smile.

“Good point,” he said and laughed. “I heard you mention a mixer. Would you like me to prepare some refreshments?”

“There’s an idea,” Lauren said. “If people have food in their mouth, they can’t talk to us, and we don’t have to talk to them.”

Mavis set her glass down.

“Stop that right now,” she scolded. “We want this event to be a success. If we all go into it with that kind of attitude, it’s guaranteed it will be a flop.”

Lauren broke the tortilla chip she was holding.

“Sorry, I was just kidding.”

“I know you were, but I’m serious,” Mavis said. “The success of this event not only reflects on the quilters in town, it reflects on our community as a whole. Just because it wasn’t *our* idea doesn’t mean it isn’t a good idea.”

“She’s right,” Aunt Beth added. “With the economy the way it’s been, any opportunity to bring tourists into Foggy Point is important. Maybe they’ll come back with their families in the summer.”

Robin squeezed a wedge of lime over her tacos.

“I hadn’t thought of that aspect. I’m just worried about gathering materials for the classes I’m taking. I’m also planning the stretching programs the organizing committee asked me to do.”

“So, back to the mixer idea,” Harriet said. “You said Friday? The official program starts on Sunday, doesn’t it?”

Aunt Beth wiped her mouth on her napkin before answering.

“Yes, the quilting program starts on Sunday. We offered out-of-town visitors the option of arriving Friday so they would have a day to recover before we got serious about stitching. The Chamber of Commerce organized some tours of Foggy Point and the surrounding areas. One of the Small Stitches called me and asked if we could do something with them Friday.”

“I heard they were offering a day trip by ferry to Victoria on Saturday,” DeAnn offered. “They hired a bus to take people to Port Angeles for departure.”

“That sounds fun,” Harriet said. “Maybe Sharon will want to go.”

Lauren sat back in her chair.

“What did you have in mind for the mixer?”

Connie went to the side table, picked up the iced tea pitcher, and carried it back, offering refills.

“I saw Glynnis at the store, and she told me that almost half of the people are taking them up on the Friday option. If even half of that half come, plus us and at least some of the Small Stitches, that will be too large a group for any of the restaurants in town.”

“I can check and see if the basement room at the church is available,” Mavis volunteered.

“We can ask Jorge to supply hors d’oeuvres,” Beth suggested. “The Chamber said we could have a small budget to work with.”

Lauren looked at Harriet and then back to Connie and Mavis.

“Harriet and I can come up with a get-to-know-each-other activity.” She looked back at Harriet and smiled.

“Now, that’s the spirit,” Aunt Beth said.



Lauren finished her tacos and laid her napkin on the table.

“I called an upholsterer in Angel Harbor,” she said to Harriet, “and they have some of that heavy muslin that’s on our class list. I know our teacher said she’ll have some for us to buy. I don’t know about you, but I’d like to practice on some of it before class starts so I can make sure I’ve got the

best needle and thread combo. I'm going to get some this afternoon. Want to come with?"

"I guess I could spare a little time." Harriet mentally reviewed her schedule. "I'll have to stitch a couple of hours when we get back, but that should be no problem." She stood up. "Anyone want us to pick up some heavier muslin?"

Everyone wanted at least a half-yard. Lauren made a quick calculation and tapped the number into her smart phone.



"You know, for a few brief moments, I thought this whole crazy quilt retreat week was going to be fun," Lauren said as she backed her car out of the parking lot of Tico's Tacos.

Harriet laughed. "Trade you my scarred model for your former nun."

"No way. My ex-nun has potential. She sounds like she knows what she wants from life. Your model sounds depressing."

Harriet looked out the car window. The sun was trying to push the clouds aside.

"I hope Carla isn't given anyone too difficult. She has her hands full with Michelle and the kids and their entourage."

"Connie told me she and Rod have been taking Wendy two afternoons a week. It's partly to give Wendy special time but also to give Carla a little break."

"That reminds me. I have Lainie coming to my house to quilt. I forgot to ask the Threads if anyone can come up with something her brother could do so he can get out of that house once in a while, too."

Lauren turned onto the highway that led out away from Foggy Point.

"He's a little young for me to teach him programming, but I ran into Tom Bainbridge in the coffee shop a couple of days ago. He's designing an addition to the house of those people he stayed with during last year's storm. I think he's going to do some work himself on the existing structure, too. He might be willing to take on an apprentice."

Tom's mother had run a fiber arts school and retreat center the Loose Threads had attended the previous year in the town of Angel Harbor.

"Great idea." Harriet closed her eyes. "My life isn't complicated enough with Aiden and his sister and my past coming to haunt me for a week. Let's stir the other man I've dated since I've lived here into the mix so Aiden can get all defensive and Sharon can go back to California and tell everyone how I've become a harlot."

"Hey, you're the one who needed ideas. You don't have to rescue every stray puppy that comes along, you know."

“Why does life have to be so complicated?”

“That’s a small town for you. If you want to be anonymous, move back to a big city.”

Harriet looked at her and shook her head.

“I’m assuming you have an idea for this mixer you volunteered us for.”

“Not really, I was just sucking up to Mavis and your aunt. After her lecture about the economy and all that, I figured I needed to do a little damage control.”

“What if we made color copies of crazy quilt blocks and cut them in half like puzzle pieces then gave every person who enters a half of the block? We could separate the halves into two groups; we locals would take from one pile and the visitors from the other. Everyone has to find the person with the matching half-block.”

“That sounds easy enough. Where will we get the pictures?”

“The teachers all sent pictures of their work for promotional purposes. I’ll email them and ask if we can use their quilt images for this,” Harriet volunteered.

“Let me know when you have the okay. I have a good color copier that will take card stock without eating it. We can use that.”

The women traveled in silence for a few minutes before Lauren spoke again.

“So, how *are* things going with Aiden? Is his sister really better?”

“Everything is improving. Michelle is never going to be my favorite person, but she seems to be trying. Her law license has been suspended, although if she can document that her actions were driven by a diagnosed mental illness that is now controlled by medication, she might have a chance of having the suspension lifted.”

“Is she hanging out at Aiden’s house while she waits for that to happen?”

Harriet smiled. “Believe it or not, she’s doing volunteer law clerk work in the legal aid office.”

Lauren glanced at Harriet then looked back to the road.

“Seriously? That really *is* a miracle.”

“I told you, I think she’s really trying.”

“Want to stop for a drive-thru coffee?” Lauren asked. “There’s a Dutch Bros coming up at the next exit.”

“We haven’t been driving for thirty minutes yet.”

“And your point?”

Harriet laughed. “Sure, I’d love a coffee.”

## Chapter 4

The sky had turned the dark blue-gray that immediately follows sunset in the northwest.

“I’ll call you when we have the go-ahead to use the crazy quilt pictures,” Harriet said as she got out of Lauren’s car in Jorge’s parking lot.

“I’ll wait with bated breath.”

Alone by her car, she debated going into the restaurant; but dinner was in full swing, so Jorge would be busy, and she needed to get home and stitch on her customer’s quilt.

She took the route past Mr. and Mrs. Renfro’s tidy home. They had been friends of Tom’s mother’s, and he stayed with them whenever he was in Foggy Point for more than a day. It wouldn’t hurt to see if his car was in their driveway, she reasoned.

It was, and before she could think about it, she was on their porch asking if Tom was there.

“Come in, dearie.” Mrs. Renfro guided Harriet into a small entrance hall. “Tom will welcome the rescue. We don’t get much company, so my husband has him trapped in the kitchen, talking his ear off.”

The small woman took Harriet’s coat, and before she knew it she was seated with Tom in a cozy kitchen eating nook, dining on homemade lasagna and green salad.

“I feel like I’m intruding,” she told her host. “I really just wanted to talk to Tom briefly.”

“It’s no trouble at all,” Mr. Renfro assured her. “We don’t get much company since the grandkids are all off in college. Mamma still cooks like the whole tribe is coming over every night.”

“I’ll take the extra over to the homeless camp,” his wife assured Harriet. “And I have a whole other pan for them cooling on the screened porch.”

“Tom, here, made the camp folks an outdoor cook stove so they can reheat it,” Mr. Renfro added proudly.

Harriet looked across the table at Tom. He smiled and raised his eyebrows.

“What did you want to talk to me about?”

“I’m looking for a project for a young man who needs to spend some time away from his iron-fisted nanny and annoying mother.” She looked at each of the people seated at the table, waiting a beat for a reaction. When one wasn’t forthcoming, she continued. “Aiden’s niece and nephew are staying at his house with their mother, tutor and nanny. His niece is taking quilting lessons with me, and I’d like to find a man to spend some time with her brother. I was hoping you might be doing some sort of home-handy project Etienne could help with.”

Tom put his hand to his chin and rubbed absently.

“I’m doing some design work for the Renfros, but I can’t think of any hands-on activity I could include a child in. We won’t start the construction phase for a few months. I take it he’s young?”

Harriet’s shoulders sagged slightly. “Yeah, he’s nine or ten, I think.”

Mr. Renfro cleared his throat.

“I could use a lad like that. I’m about to start working on the wooden toys I make for the church Christmas bazaar. It takes me most of the year to make enough to sell as well as some to donate to the hospital children’s wing. He could help with sanding and painting...and cleaning up, of course.”

“If you’re sure, that would be great. I think Etienne will be thrilled. I was willing to teach him to quilt, but Carla didn’t think the old-school nanny and tutor would go for it.”

Mrs. Renfro passed her a basket of warm French bread.

“Here, dear, have some bread, and then you can tell us all about this quilt retreat we’re hearing about all over town.”

Harriet spent the rest of the dinner explaining what crazy quilting is and telling her hosts about the planned events.

“I’m going to be bringing a collection of quilts my mother had,” Tom added when Harriet was through. “My whole life, my mother stopped at every garage sale, estate sale, yard sale or any other type of sale you can imagine searching for quilts. Most of the time, the stuff she found had been badly abused, but every once in a while she found real treasure. She has three crazy quilts she got at an estate sale that were made by the deceased’s grandmother in the late eighteen-hundreds. They had been stored properly and are in mint condition.”

“That’s amazing. Considering how many women have quilted in the past, relatively few quilts have survived in perfect shape. And speaking of that, I need to go home and work on a quilt for one of my customers.”

She thanked the Renfros, collected her purse and coat and headed for the door, followed by Tom. He stopped when they reached her car and put his hands on her shoulders.

“How are things with you and the good doctor?”

Harriet was silent for a moment.

“I guess you could say we’re still in a holding pattern. His sister is back in town living at his house with her children. She’s on medication and seems to be recovering from her problems. She and Aiden are working on building trust again.”

He squeezed her shoulders gently.

“That’s great, but, Harriet, I think you know what I’m asking. Are you and Aiden a couple or not?” He pulled her into his arms. “I know I keep telling you I won’t pressure you, but I need to know if I’m fooling myself here.”

She rested her head on his shoulder.

“Why do relationships have to be so complicated?”

He dropped his hands to her waist.

“They don’t have to be.”

“If you’re tired of this dance we’re doing, I’ll understand if you want to opt out.”

He held her out at arm’s length so he could look into her eyes.

“Don’t put words in my mouth. I just want to know if I’m still in the game. As long as you haven’t made any commitments, I’m willing to wait and see how this all plays out. My money is on the good doctor self-destructing. He can’t figure out how to put you first, and I’m thinking you’re going to get tired of always taking a back seat to his family.”

Harriet leaned back against his chest.

“Did I tell you the wife of my dead husband’s best friend is coming to stay with me during quilt week? The friend that blames me for Steve not getting treatment.”

“Oh, sweetheart, I’m sorry.” He kissed the top of her head. “Can I do anything to help?” He laughed. “Besides stop asking you to make a decision?”

“Thanks for offering.” She moved out of his arms but held on to both his hands. “I’m not sure why you’re so good to me.”

“Maybe it’s because we’re friends? No matter what happens in the future, we’ll always be friends.”



“I better get going—I really do have to work tonight. Can you tell Mr. Renfro I’ll call him to set up a time for Etienne if everyone on that end of things agrees?”

He pulled her car door open for her.

“I will pass the message along, and if you think of anything I can do to help, let me know—and not just about the boy.”

Harriet got in her car and opened the window, smiling up as he leaned in through the window and gave her a quick kiss.

“If anything comes to mind, you’ll be the first person I call.”

Tom straightened up, and she backed down the driveway, not closing her window until she reached the street.

Instead of heading up the hill to her house, she went downhill toward Foggy Point and the Steaming Cup coffee shop. Her head was swimming after talking to Tom. She knew if she tried to stitch right now she’d likely destroy her customer’s quilt.

With Tom safely two hours away in Angel Harbor, she could pretend she didn’t feel anything for him and concentrate on whatever her relationship was with Aiden. However, as much as she tried to deny it to herself, when she was around Tom, her body reacted to him. Maybe it wasn’t the liquid fire that raced through her when Aiden kissed her, but her toes did tingle at Tom’s touch. There was no denying it.

“I thought you were quilting this evening,” Lauren said from behind her as she stood at the coffee bar waiting for her drink to be prepared.

Harriet’s shoulders sagged. Lauren moved to her side.

“I know that look. Which of your men have you just seen?”

“Do you really want to hear about my sorry love life?” Harriet picked up her cup from the counter.

Lauren glanced at the face of her smartphone.

“I’ve got a few minutes. Lay it on me.”

Harriet led the way to two overstuffed chairs near the fireplace. When they were seated, she gave her friend a short version of her visit to the Renfros’ and the subsequent dinner.

“Do you think I’m hanging on to an impossible relationship with Aiden because he was my first relationship after my husband died?”

Lauren took a sip of her mocha.

“Does this mean Tom is a contender again?”

Harriet leaned her head in her hand, her elbow braced on the arm of the chair.

“I don’t know *what* it means. All I know is I like Aiden, but everything is hard. I like Tom, maybe not in exactly the same way, but I like him—and he’s so uncomplicated.”

“Is uncomplicated another way of saying boring?” Lauren asked her.

“No, it’s not, and that’s what’s so confusing. I really do like Tom, and he’s an interesting guy. He’s definitely there for me when I need him to be. I can’t say the same about Aiden. He’s there as long as his family doesn’t need anything at the same time.”

“But if Tom was all that, we wouldn’t be having this conversation.”

Harriet sighed. “That’s why I’m sitting here instead of at home doing my work. I can’t figure out if I’m not allowing myself to fully engage with Tom because I’m not willing to commit to someone who’s really available. Maybe I’m sticking with Aiden no matter how unavailable he is for that very reason. If he’s never available I don’t have to risk losing someone again.”

“Whoa, back up. I thought your husband was a liar and your marriage a sham.”

“I’m not sure where you got that. Steve did keep his health problem a secret, along with his misguided decision to not seek treatment for it. But why do you think it hurt so much? I loved him, and I know he loved me. I may not understand why he did what he did, but I know he loved me. We were happy.”

Lauren set her cup on a table beside her chair and leaned toward Harriet, staring her in the face.

“Do you feel guilty about his failure to get treatment? Like it was somehow your fault? You have to know that’s not true.”

“I do know that. I also know his friends think it *was* my fault. After Steve died, I went to a therapist for a while. A lot of what we talked about was personal responsibility and our inability to ever truly know why other people do what they do.”

“But?”

“In my dark moments, I wonder if, deep down inside, part of me still believes I could have done something different that would have resulted in a different outcome.”

“And that makes you think you don’t deserve to be happy?”

Harriet attempted a weak smile.

“Something like that.”

Lauren straightened in her chair and picked her drink back up.

“Well, guilty or not, I don’t think you’re sticking by Aiden to punish yourself. Anyone can see the way you light up when he’s around. That’s not guilt-driven.” She rubbed her chin with her free hand. “I have to admit, though, you and Tom looked pretty happy when you were driving around in the storm delivering food last winter.”

“So you could see me with either one of them?”

“Unfortunately, I can’t be of any help on this one. I can tell you one thing, though. Aiden may be endlessly unavailable while he deals with his family issues, but I wouldn’t bet on a guy like Tom waiting around forever to find out. He’s no one’s second fiddle.”

“You’re no help at all.”

Lauren shrugged. “I never said I was Dear Abby.”

They finished their drinks in silence, each lost in her own thoughts.

Harriet stood up.

“Now I really do need to go stitch on that customer quilt.”

Lauren pulled her tablet computer from her bag.

“I’m going to do some work before I go home. I was stuck and thought a change of venue might help.”

“Shall we meet tomorrow to work on the mixer?”

Lauren agreed, and Harriet left, her stomach still tied in knots.

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

[Buy Now - Amazon](#)

[Buy Now - B&N](#)

