

The book cover features a central quilt with a repeating pattern of peace symbols. The quilt is primarily dark blue with white and light blue geometric shapes forming the symbols. The title 'Make Quilts Not War' is written in a large, bold, yellow-orange serif font across the top. Below the title, the text 'A HARRIET TRUMAN/LOOSE THREADS MYSTERY' is written in a smaller, white, sans-serif font. At the bottom, the author's name 'Arlene Sachitano' is written in a yellow-orange serif font. The entire cover is framed by a decorative border of colorful squares in shades of purple, red, orange, and grey.

Make Quilts Not War

A HARRIET TRUMAN/LOOSE THREADS MYSTERY

Arlene Sachitano



MAKE QUILTS NOT WAR

A Harriet Truman/Loose Threads Mystery



Arlene Sachitano



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.

MAKE QUILTS NOT WAR

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This book is dedicated to Colonel Henry Bohne, Medical Corp, US Army Reserve. In an age when his peers are traveling to resorts and golf courses, Hank has joined the army and put himself in harm's way to care for our injured soldiers. For that we thank him.

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Prologue

The shooter couldn't have planned better circumstances. Evenly spaced along the exterior wall of the large exhibition area were alcoves with life-sized statues representing prominent figures from Washington state's past. Captain Robert Gray was shown holding his spyglass to his eye. It was perfect.

The backlighting meant anyone looking away from the well-lit quilt display would see the silhouette of the statue, the spyglass pointing directly at the target, hiding the rifle of the killer concealed in its shadow.

The target, unaware she was taking her last breaths, stood on the far side of the show floor on a raised stage, a white glove on one hand to allow her to handle the quilt hanging behind her without fear of soiling it. The glove wasn't going to be any help, the shooter mused then sighted on the target and pulled the trigger.

Chapter 1

It was a dark time,” Mavis Willis said.

The Loose Threads quilt group sat spellbound around the table in the large classroom at the back of Pins and Needles, Foggy Point, Washington’s, best and only quilt store.

“Cotton had once been king. Up until the early nineteen-sixties, something like eighty percent of the textiles sold in America were made of cotton. By the mid-nineteen-seventies, it was down to maybe thirty-five percent. Cotton was displaced by the scourge of the decade.”

“Polyester?” Harriet Truman said in a hushed voice.

“That and worse,” Mavis replied. “Synthetics of all sorts. Our fabric, our threads, our upholstery—the very warp and weft of our being was being supplanted by a poseur.”

“What did you do?” Carla Salter asked, her eyes round. At twenty-three, she was the youngest member of the group and had never experienced polyester fabric firsthand.

“What *could* we do?” Harriet’s Aunt Beth answered for her friend. “We used what was available. Our fabric was a cotton/acrylic blend, heavy on the acrylic.”

“I think everyone made at least one polyester knit quilt, too,” Mavis confessed with a small shrug.

“Yes,” Beth agreed. “We all have them.”

“Where?” Harriet challenged. “I’ve never seen yours.”

“Would you display it, if you had one?” Mavis asked.

“Good point,” Harriet said.

“I’m sure the colors were different back then, too.” Robin McLeod said tactfully.

“If you mean avocado green, electric orange and mustard yellow, you’re right, if the pictures in my mom’s photo album are any indication,” Lauren Sawyer added.

“Those were the colors of the times,” said Aunt Beth. “Not just for quilts, either. Appliances and shag carpets also favored them.”

“I guess I’m glad our house is historic,” Harriet said, referring to the spacious Victorian home her aunt had given her, along with the long-arm quilting business housed within, when the older woman had retired.

“I wanted a harvest gold refrigerator in the worst way,” Aunt Beth mused. “I was so jealous when Mavis got hers.” She smiled at her friend.

“My mami was so thrilled when *papi* put Astroturf on our cement patio,” Connie Escorcía said, rolling her eyes to the ceiling. “*Diós mio*,” she added with a laugh. “Those were the days.”

“How old were you in the sixties?” Carla asked Connie, blushing at her own boldness in asking such a personal question.

“Those were my glory days,” Connie replied with a smile. “I was a teenager. I was born in nineteen-fifty, so I turned ten in nineteen-sixty. My mami taught me to sew on her sewing machine when I was twelve, but I didn’t take up quilting until my babies were in school. By then, I’d gone back to teaching, so I didn’t have a lot of time.”

“When do we need to have our quilts finished?” Lauren interrupted. She looked at the clock on her phone. “I have to meet my client in forty-five minutes.”

“The sixties festival opens in exactly four weeks,” Harriet said. “They want us to have the quilts hanging in the exhibition hall by Friday of the week before.”

“Yikes,” Robin McLeod exclaimed. “I got behind when the power was out from the storm. I’ve got mine cut out, but I haven’t sewn a stitch yet.”

“You better get cracking,” Mavis said. “They didn’t do long-arm machine quilting back then, so Harriet isn’t going to be able to stitch your quilt for you.”

“I’m tying mine with yarn,” Carla said.

“That was popular back then,” Beth assured her.

“What are *you* doing, Harriet?” Lauren asked.

“I’m working with some cheater cloth,” she replied, referring to a fabric that is preprinted with images of pieced quilt blocks. “I’m doing some piecing to go along with it, but I’m not sure I like what I’ve gotten done so far.”

“I’ll be done with mine by next week,” Jenny Logan said. “I can help sew binding or...” She looked at Carla. “...tie knots.”

“You made another quilt?” Lauren asked. “I thought I heard Marjory ask you to bring that quilt you have in your guest room. Didn’t you say you made that in the sixties?”

Marjory was the owner of Pins and Needles and was chair of the textile show committee for the upcoming festival.

“Yes, but that was forty-some years ago. The fabric is faded and worn, and I was just learning to quilt back then.”

“It looked like it was in pretty good shape when I saw it,” Lauren persisted.

“I need to do something current. I wish I’d never shown it to you all. I wasn’t a real quilter back then. The batting is an old blanket, and I made the blocks from old clothes. And I tied it with acrylic yarn.” She shuddered with the memory.

“Marjory’s not going to take no for an answer,” Mavis told her. “She’s looked at every authentic sixties quilt in our community, and yours was the only one that didn’t have orange and brown in it. They want to hang it in the exhibit hall, and with those mustard-colored walls, orange just wouldn’t work.”

“I’m still not comfortable with it,” Jenny said, tucking a stray strand of silver hair behind her ear then patting it into place.

“It captures the youthful spirit of the times,” Harriet said. “Besides, anyone who attends quilt shows around here knows your quilting has improved dramatically since the sixties. If it bothers you that much, I’m sure you could ask them to leave your name off of it. Do you have a label on the back?”

“Of course not,” Jenny snapped then reddened when Harriet and Carla stared at her. Her tone softened. “I mean, we didn’t think of that back in those days. It was just a quilt meant to be used on a bed. And thank you, I will ask Marjory if they can leave my name out of it.”

“I just hope all this effort is worth it,” Aunt Beth said. “I know some of the other communities around here have had success with theme weeks during the dead of winter as a way to pull tourists in, but no one has ever done the sixties before.”

“It does seem like that time period would better lend itself to a summer event—summer of love and all that,” Harriet said.

“The committee thought people were burning out on murder mystery weekends, especially with what’s been going on in Foggy Point the last few months,” Mavis said.

“Langley isn’t that far from here,” Beth added, referring to the host community of a very successful mystery weekend held every year on Whidby Island.

She and Mavis had been on a planning subcommittee once the main group had decided to add a quilt show to the lineup of events.

“I can’t imagine any theme they could choose that would boost my business. I’m in such a specialized niche tourism doesn’t affect me at all.” Harriet said.

“You got some additional work when we did the Civil War quilts last summer, didn’t you?” Lauren asked.

“I did, but it was from you guys, not new customers, and then no one did new quilts for a month after that, so in the end it wasn’t an increase at all.”

“Well, at least the stores and restaurants will get a lift,” Jenny said.

“I heard the newspaper was going to run a special edition, with headlines from the era,” Robin said, rejoining the conversation. She and her friend DeAnn Gault had been concentrating on the binding they were hand stitching on a lap quilt they were making as a gift for Robin’s elderly grandmother.

“They’re offering very affordable advertising,” Marjory chimed in from the kitchen across the hall. She came into the classroom. “The staff will help you tailor your ad to the theme. They got into

their archives and made copies of representative advertising from nineteen sixty-eight.”

“Wow, they’re really getting into it,” Harriet said.

“My mom is digging out a couple of macramé pieces she made for the county fair,” DeAnn said.

Carla looked up, clearly confused.

“Macramé was a popular craft back in the day,” Aunt Beth said.

“People braided polyester cord into intricate designs,” Mavis added.

“They made hangers for potted plants, or sometimes you could put little glass or mirror pieces into them and make a hanging shelf,” Beth continued. “We all tried our hand at it.”

“People made belts and guitar straps and choker necklaces, too,” Jenny said. “They usually used hemp cord for the bracelets and neckwear, though.”

“Sounds...interesting,” Carla said, her cheeks turning pink as she spoke.

“They were interesting times,” Mavis said.

“It was the Age of Aquarius,” Connie said with a smile.

“It was also the age of assassinations, the age of the war in Vietnam, the cultural revolution in China and the six-day war in Israel,” Lauren said.

“Every era has its share of sad things,” Mavis said with a sigh.

“I’m surprised you didn’t mention the invention of the computer, Lauren,” DeAnn said.

“The computer wasn’t ‘invented,’” Lauren corrected. “A series of innovations allowed the computer to evolve into its present state.”

“The sixties were definitely political times,” Robin mused.

“And it was a time of good music,” DeAnn said. “Marjory,” she called in a voice loud enough to carry. Marjory had returned to the retail area of the shop.

“You rang?” Marjory said as she appeared at the classroom doorway a moment later.

“Someone told me you guys landed a big-name rock star for the grand finale,” DeAnn said.

“As a matter of fact, we did. And not just for the finale. We’re having a ‘senior prom,’ of sorts, and he’s agreed to play at that, also.”

“Don’t keep us in suspense,” Harriet prompted.

“We got Colm Byrne,” Marjory said with a smile.

“Colm Byrne? The Irish rock star? That Colm Byrne?” Harriet asked. “How did you land him?”

“We have our ways,” Marjory said and laughed. “Actually, Jerry Weber is on our committee, and he apparently knows him. I don’t know if Colm has looked at real estate in this area with him or what.”

Jerry owned and operated Foggy Point’s biggest real estate office.

“All I know is, we decided we wanted music, and Jerry made a few phone calls, and suddenly we’d booked Colm Byrne and we’re only paying a pittance.” She turned and left the room.

“Wow,” Harriet said and sat back in her chair.

“Wow is right,” Robin agreed.

The group around the table fell momentarily silent.

“Did the Loose Threads go home?” Jorge Perez asked as he came into the room carrying a large insulated box. “I hear no one speaking. This can’t be the Loose Threads I know and love.” He laughed. “They are never without words.”

“Marjory just told us the festival committee has landed Colm Byrne as the musical entertainment,” Harriet said.

“Colm Byrne the Irish rock star?” Jorge asked. “I think Marjory is telling you stories.”

“It’s true,” Marjory protested as she returned once again. “Jerry Weber has some connection to him or someone influential in his entourage.”

“He will draw a crowd,” Jorge said and smiled. He set his box on the table and removed the lid. “Now, who’s hungry?”

The Loose Threads had arranged to use the classroom all day so they could make serious headway on the projects they were finishing up to make way for their sixties quilts. Jorge had agreed to deliver lunch from his Mexican restaurant, Tico’s Tacos, so the group wouldn’t have to go out.

“Here, Lauren,” He said and handed her a brown paper bag. “Señora Beth said you have to leave early and wouldn’t be staying for lunch.”

“Thank you,” Lauren said as she took the bag. She looked at Beth.

“You said you were dealing with your difficult client when I saw you yesterday. If it’s the same one from before, they seem to have a nose for when we eat. I had Jorge make your food to go just in case—seems like I was right.”

“You were, indeed,” Lauren said and put her coat on, then picked up her sewing bag, tucking her lunch inside.

“What are we having?” Harriet asked.

“I brought cheese quesadillas, pork tacos and chicken burritos and, of course, chips, salsa and guacamole and...” He paused to take a plastic box from his big container. “...a chicken salad for Señora Robin.”

“Thank you.” Robin sounded surprised.

“You think I don’t notice what everyone eats?” Jorge said with a wink.

“What are *you* doing for the festival?” DeAnn asked.

“I’m doing what I always do,” Jorge said. “Making food. My restaurant is timeless, so I don’t need to do anything there. I’m on the food committee for the festival. We’re having a food court at the community center in the walkway between the exhibit hall and the auditorium where the music will be. I guess they’re going to have the high school bands from Foggy Point and Angel Harbor playing music a couple of times a day before the big concerts at night.”

“What sorts of food will be available?” Carla asked.

“We’ll have tacos and hamburgers and hotdogs, but also we’ll have a cart of foods from the era—fondue, peanut butter and Marshmallow Fluff sandwiches, on soft white bread, of course. We’ll have spaghetti from a can, little pizzas made from round crackers with a slice of pepperoni and mozzarella cheese...” He paused to think. “Instant breakfast in a can, vegetable sandwiches with sprouts—that was toward the end of the era. Twinkies, Ding-Dongs, HoHo’s, if we can find some.”

He ticked these items off on his fingers.

“We’re having brownies, but not with anything *special* in them, we’ll have cans of Fresca soda, someone is bringing that gelatin that separated into three layers. And I’m sure there is more I’m not remembering.”

“Lots of us were cooking perfectly normal food every day,” Mavis said, “But those meals weren’t especially memorable—or tied to a single point in time, for that matter.”

“Isn’t that when we got our first Julia Child cookbooks?” Aunt Beth asked.

“Maybe,” Mavis looked at her longtime friend. “Or that could have been in the seventies.” She sighed. “It all runs together after a while. In any case, Twinkies and Marshmallow Fluff were much more memorable.”

“Can you stay and eat with us?” Harriet asked Jorge.

“I think I can spare a few minutes to eat,” he said and glanced at his watch. “I don’t have to sew anything if I stay, do I?”

Chapter 2

Who needs a wig?” Harriet asked as she set a large shopping bag on the cutting table in her quilting studio.

Mavis and Beth sat in the two wingback chairs by the bow window in the reception area, each holding a mug of steaming tea. Jenny was in a folding chair to their left, a large black tote at her feet. Robin and DeAnn stood with Lauren at the short end of the cutting table, a pile of clothing between them.

“Sorry I’m late,” Carla said, stripping off her wet rain coat as she came in from the outside parking area. “I’m sorry, did I interrupt?” Her cheeks, red already from the cold, reddened further.

“Harriet was just asking if anyone needs a wig,” Beth told her. “And I’m pretty sure we were all going to say yes.”

“Ewww, where did they come from?” Lauren asked. “You didn’t get them from the thrift store, did you?”

“Maybe,” Harriet said evasively. “I got a deal from a wholesale wig place in Seattle for six of them. I got four more from DeAnn.”

She paused, and DeAnn took up the story.

“When Nana first got dementia and we didn’t know what was going on, she went on a huge catalog shopping spree. It didn’t matter what sort of catalog came in the mail. If she got it, she ordered something—or many somethings. She must have gotten a wig catalog at some point, because we found a box with five brand-new ones in it.”

“That’s handy,” Lauren said. “What about the thrift store?”

“Okay, I did find three killer wigs at Trash and Treasures.” Harriet reached into her bag and pulled out a handful of black fluff and held it up. “I found this afro, and it was too perfect to pass up. I washed it three times.”

“Toss it over,” Jenny said and held her hands up to receive it.

Harriet carried the wig around the table then lobbed it. Jenny caught it then turned it in her hands to orient the cap before pulling it onto her head.

“Is it me?”

“Tuck your hair in around the back,” Lauren suggested, “unless you like looking like a skunk.”

“Let me help you,” Carla offered. She set the mug of tea she’d just poured on the big table and stood behind Jenny, tucking stray strands of hair neatly under the wig cap.

Harriet laughed. “It’s perfect,” she choked out. “Let me get a mirror.”

She disappeared through the door into her kitchen and the house beyond. She returned a moment later with a hand-held mirror and gave it to Jenny.

“Oooh,” Jenny said. “It’s definitely me.”

“What else do you have?” Mavis asked. “Anything in red?”

Harriet pulled all the wigs from her bag and passed them around. After a few minutes of trial-and-error, everyone except Lauren had chosen new hair.

“I’m going to go with my own,” Lauren said and ran her hand through her long, straight blond hair, pulling out a hair clip that had been holding it away from her face. “I’ve been growing my bangs out ever since we started talking about this, so I can cut them just above my eyes like that singer Mary from that old sixties folk group.”

“Well, honey, you’re the only one in this group that could pull that off,” Mavis told her.

“I hope Connie likes her bob,” Jenny said.

“What’s not to like?” Aunt Beth asked and laughed.

“Sorry I missed last week,” DeAnn said. “The kids all had a stomach bug, and I didn’t want to risk sharing it with you-all.”

“And we thank you for that,” Harriet told her.

“You didn’t miss anything,” Lauren added. “A bunch of people went to Seattle to shop for costumes, so only a few were left to work on their quilts.”

“We weren’t just shopping. We were picking up the posters and flyers and some other signs,” Mavis informed DeAnn. “The committee got a donation from a big printing company. It worked out that we were able to do a little shopping for our costumes while we were there.”

Jenny got up and dumped the contents of her bag onto the cutting table as Robin pushed the pile of clothes near her to the center.

“Dig in,” Aunt Beth said. “Mavis and I put the stuff we thought you ladies would be interested in on the table, but we have several more bags in the garage. The organizing committee asked us to bring back some selections for them, too.”

“Where did you find all this stuff?” Harriet asked.

“We found two vintage clothing stores that had a lot of sixties stuff that was reasonably priced. Then, we went to a theatrical costume store. The fringed vests and beaded headbands came from there; some of the bell bottoms, too,” Mavis reported.

“I brought some things from the church clothing drive closet,” Jenny said. “We’ve been pulling out anything that looks to be of that vintage and setting it aside for this event.”

“And we hit a military surplus store on our way back,” Aunt Beth added.

“Is everything here up for grabs?” Jenny asked as she held up a long-fringed cowhide vest.

“Yes,” Beth replied. “Mavis and I already have our costumes.”

“That vest will be killer with your ‘fro,” Harriet said.



“Can I interest anyone in brownies?” Harriet asked when everyone had decided on an outfit and either taken it to her car or stowed it in her stitching bag.

“Even I won’t say no to chocolate,” Robin said.

“I’m not sure why you bother to ask,” Lauren added and got up to follow Harriet to the kitchen.

They returned with a large platter of chewy brownies and a stack of pink paper plates and matching napkins.

“Anyone need a refill on their drink?” Harriet asked. “I got some of that holiday spice tea on sale at the Steaming Cup yesterday if anyone wants one last cup of it before it goes away until next Christmas.”

Lauren retrieved the coffee carafe from the drip machine in the kitchen and topped off the cups of the three people who were drinking coffee while Harriet did the same with hot water from the electric kettle for the tea drinkers.

“Can we see a copy of the flyers you picked up?” she asked when she and Lauren were through with their hostess duties.

Mavis reached into the canvas tote on the floor by her chair, pulled out a trifold brochure, and handed it to Harriet.

“Oh, nice. Look, Jenny, your quilt is on the front.” She held up the flyer for all to see.

“I wish they hadn’t done that,” Jenny said, the color draining from her face. She pulled the flyer from Harriet’s hands and examined it. “I told Marjory she could display my quilt, and I didn’t *really* want to do that. She didn’t say anything about putting it on her advertising materials.”

“You must have let them take the picture,” Lauren pointed out.

“I let them take a few pictures, but Marjory said it was just for layout and planning purposes. No one said anything about using it for anything else.”

“It’s a pretty quilt,” Carla said in a soft voice. “And it looks like it’s in really good condition.”

“That’s not the point,” Jenny snapped. “It’s ancient history, and it isn’t anything like what I do today.”

“I think that’s the whole point,” Mavis said. “And if you feel that strongly, I’m sure Marjory will take it down and give it back to you.”

“It’s a little late for that now.” Jenny handed the flyer back to Mavis then stood and pulled on her leather jacket. “I’ve got to go,” she said, and left without another word.

“Well, that was weird,” Lauren said, breaking the silence that had ensued.

“Something’s going on,” Harriet agreed. “She’s been weird about that quilt ever since Marjory asked her to let them hang it in the show.”

“I agree,” Robin said. Being an attorney, she was usually careful in her opinions, so her statement carried weight with the group. “She didn’t have to keep the quilt in a place where we could all see it at her house, and even then, she could have said no when the committee asked.”

“Yeah, but she’s the nice one of this group,” Lauren pointed out. “Every group has one member who is nicer than everybody else, and she’s our designated nice person, so she probably *couldn’t* say no. It would ruin her reputation.”

Harriet looked at her.

“You’re nuts,” she said.

“Maybe she didn’t make it herself,” Carla suggested. “Did she ever say she was the one who made it?”

“Good point.” Lauren looked at Beth. “Do we know the answer?”

“Now that you mention it, I’m not sure the question ever came up,” Beth replied.

“Why would it?” Harriet asked. “I mean, when I visit any of you and see a homemade quilt on a bed, I just assume you made it. I would never ask you if you’d done it yourself.”

“Clearly, there’s an issue,” Mavis said. “I’m sure Jenny will tell us all in good time.”

“We aren’t going to solve it today,” Aunt Beth said. “So, how is everyone doing on their quilt? Does anyone need help?”

“All I have to do is the yarn ties on mine,” Carla said.

“Mine’s done,” Robin volunteered.

“I’m binding mine,” DeAnn added.

The rest of the group reported they were similarly close to being done.

“Don’t forget, we need the hanging sleeve to be four inches deep to accommodate the metal pipes they’re using to make the hanging racks,” Mavis reminded them.

“All right,” Beth said. “We’ve got our wigs and costumes, and our quilts are nearly done. I declare the Loose Threads ready for a return of the nineteen-sixties.”

“Far out,” Harriet said.

Chapter 3

He didn't tell you anything about your date except you should wear something smashing and be prepared for something big?" Lauren asked for what seemed like the hundredth time.

"No, and if you ask me another hundred times, I still won't know anything else," Harriet snapped.

She didn't like surprises. When she was growing up, the word *surprise* in a letter or phone call from her parents usually preceded an announcement they were sending her to a new boarding school, or that she had to join them at some conference where they were going to be interviewed and wanted to come off like devoted parents. It was never good. Not once.

"You don't have to bite my head off," Lauren shot back.

She'd come by to go through the bags of costume pieces, claiming she wanted to see if there was a better blouse choice. But the tunic she'd already chosen was perfect, and they both knew she was there because Harriet had let it slip the day before she would be getting ready for a big date with Aiden Jalbert this afternoon.

"I'm just having a hard time believing you agreed to this gig without any more information than that. I mean, it's no big secret there's been trouble in paradise this winter."

"I guess I won't know if I don't go, will I?"

"What if he's making the grand gesture because of the reappearance of Tom? Would you want him to be committing to you just because another guy is showing interest?"

“Let’s not get ahead of ourselves. Not that it’s any of your business, but things have been better with Aiden the last few weeks. And there is no reason to believe that his ‘grand gesture,’ as you put it, has anything to do with commitment or anything else.”

“He’s sending a limo to pick you up, and he told you to prepare for something big. That sounds like a little more than a dinner out to me.”

“And you’re suddenly the expert on romance?”

“Just because I don’t currently have a boy toy doesn’t mean I’ve never had one. Besides, I read romance novels.”

“Really?”

“We all have our weakness,” Lauren said. “What jewelry are you going to wear with that?” She pointed at the little black dress Harriet had laid on the ironing board in her studio.

“I’m still debating. You want to look at the choices?”

Harriet loaded her dress back onto its padded hanger and led Lauren through the connecting door into the kitchen and upstairs to her bedroom. She hung the dress on the closet door and opened a wooden jewelry box that sat on top of her dresser.

“Oh, my gosh!” Lauren said. “Is that stuff real?”

She pointed at the neat lines of jewel-encrusted gold and silver necklaces that lay on the velvet surface of the top tray. Harriet opened the first drawer of the box, revealing three strands of pearls. She sighed.

“Yeah, my parents thought jewelry could make up for their absence on the holidays.” She held up a pearl choker with a diamond-and-ruby clasp. “I wanted new riding boots one year for Christmas, but I got this instead.”

“That would look really good with your dress,” Lauren gasped, ignoring Harriet’s musings. “Did you get earrings to match?”

Harriet pulled open the middle drawer of the box, revealing a tray of earrings. She removed a pair of pearl teardrops with diamond-and-ruby accents. Lauren took them and held them up.

“You *have* to wear these,” she said, turning them until the rubies caught the light. “I’ve got to go back to my computer now, but tomorrow I have to meet Robin at noon. I’ll come by on my way, and I want a full report. If anything big happens, call me tonight. I’ll be up until at least midnight.”

“I’d have never pegged you for such a romantic.”

“Romantic? What are you talking about? I just love a good train wreck.”

Lauren set the earrings back in the jewelry box, turned and left. Harriet was still standing in her room when she heard the kitchen door open and close again.

“Are you up there?” called Aunt Beth. “Lauren said you were in your room.”

“Do you think I’m walking into a trap?” Harriet asked her aunt when the older woman had ascended the stairs and plopped her ample self into the red overstuffed chair beside Harriet’s bed.

“What on earth are you talking about? Aren’t you going on a date with Aiden? Or did I miss something?”

“Yes, I’m going on a date. No, you didn’t miss anything. Lauren stopped by to give me a pep talk. I think.”

“Well, that explains it,” Beth said.

“I accused Lauren of being a romantic, and she said she just wanted a ringside seat to the train wreck my date is sure to be. She thinks Aiden is reacting to the threat of Tom.”

“Tom Bainbridge? Why would Aiden be threatened by Tom? He was in Foggy Point during the big storm in December, but didn’t he go back when the slide was cleared?”

Harriet and the Loose Threads had met Tom when they’d attended a retreat at his late mother’s folk art school in the community of Angel Harbor early the previous year, and had renewed their acquaintance when he’d been trapped in Foggy Point by a landslide that had blocked the highway.

“He did.” Harriet turned her back to her aunt as she began rearranging her sock drawer.

“Have you been seeing Tom?”

“Define *seeing*,” Harriet said in a careful tone.

“Oh, honey, tell me you’re not using Tom to pressure Aiden into making a move.”

“I’m not using anyone to do anything. Tom and I have had coffee a few times. He is well aware that Aiden and I are working on our relationship, and he is fine with being friends.”

“Does Aiden know you’re still seeing Tom?”

“It’s none of his business—or yours, for that matter—but yes, everyone knows about everyone else. I’m starting to get a bad feeling about this whole surprise date thing, and not just because of Lauren, either. Even you think it’s not on the up-and-up; I can hear it in your voice. You think he’s asking me out on a special date because of Tom.”

“I didn’t say that. I was just *asking* you if that’s why. It’s entirely possible he’s making a grand romantic gesture because he wants to knock your socks off. Maybe all the trouble you’ve been having lately has made him realize he could lose you, all on his own, without help from anyone.”

“Still, that’s not a good reason to make a grand gesture. And I’m afraid of what that gesture might be. He’s been afraid of any sort of commitment. What if he swings to the other end of the scale?”

“You think he plans on *proposing*?” Aunt Beth asked, the color draining from her face.

“I don’t know. That’s the problem. And why does the idea make you look so pale?”

“Oh, honey.” Beth patted her hand over her heart. “It just seems sort of sudden, given everything. And what would you say?”

“Let’s not get ahead of ourselves here. It’s equally likely he’s just taking me to a good restaurant for a romantic night out. I could cancel. Then you and Lauren wouldn’t have to worry about it.”

“I raised you better than that,” Beth scolded.

“Did you come over for something besides my tortured lack of a love life?”

“Yes, I came to see if we had a pair of bell bottoms in a size sixteen. DeAnn’s mother is going to help take tickets at the quilt show, and she’s got a tie-dyed shirt but needs something to wear with it.”

“I think there might be a white pair,” Harriet said. “The bags of clothes are down in the studio.” She glanced at the clock radio on her nightstand. “I’ve got time. Shall we go look?”



“Are you sure you don’t want me to wait with you until Aiden comes to pick you up?” Aunt Beth asked Harriet when they’d found the jeans for DeAnn’s mom and then had tea.

“You don’t need to stay and hold my hand. Besides, Aiden isn’t coming to pick me up—he’s sending a limo to take me to wherever it is we’re dining.”

“Call me tomorrow and let me know how it went, either way.”

“I know, and if it’s really exciting, you’ll be up till midnight. I got the same instructions from Lauren.”

“Mavis and I are playing Bunko at Marjory’s tonight, so we *will* be up late...if you want to call.” Beth smiled and put her coat on.

Chapter 4

The limo Aiden had promised arrived at seven sharp. “What do you think, Fred?” Harriet asked her fluffy gray cat as she twirled in a circle and came to a stop in front of the mirror in her front hall. The sleeveless black crepe cocktail dress skimmed the top of her knees. “Are the earrings too much?”

She held her hand over one ear, blocking the sparkle of the diamonds as she turned her head from side to side, evaluating each option in turn.

The doorbell rang, ending the debate.

“Enjoy your night alone,” she called to Fred.

She’d taken Scooter, her little dog, to Connie’s house for an overnight visit. Scooter had recovered dramatically after being rescued by Aiden from a hoarding home. He’d been well enough to leave the animal hospital several weeks ago but still required medication several times a day.

Connie and her husband Rod had agreed to take him for an overnight visit so Harriet wouldn’t have to come home early to administer his nightly dose.

She opened the front door to a short middle-aged man with gray hair. He was dressed in some sort of formal livery. Harriet wondered if Aiden had paid extra for the costume.

“Ms. Truman?” he asked. “I’m Mr. Jones, your driver. Your car awaits.”

“Let me get my coat,” she said and grabbed her black dress coat from the antique rack by the door.

“May I pour you a glass of champagne?” Mr. Jones asked when Harriet was seated in the white leather passenger area of the limo. He’d picked up a chilled bottle from an ice bucket, wrapping it deftly with a white towel.

“No, thank you, I’m good.” Harriet’s palms were beginning to sweat. She was happy that Aiden was making an effort, and excited to see what came next, but at the same time, she worried this whole limo-and-champagne routine was a little over-the-top.

“Let me know if I can do anything to make your journey more enjoyable,” Mr. Jones said, and when no requests were forthcoming, he closed the door and got into the driver’s seat.

If the limo was taking her anywhere in Foggy Point, it would be a short ride, Harriet thought. It soon became clear that Mr. Jones was driving a serpentine route around town, finally arriving at their destination precisely thirty minutes later.

The limo came to a stop, and a moment later, Mr. Jones opened the door. Harriet recognized the location immediately. They were in Smugglers Cove at a restaurant owned by her friend Harold’s buddy James. Harold had brought her to the place when she’d first returned to Foggy Point.

She had known from the moment Aiden asked her on this date that whatever he had planned would happen someplace where there would be a good chance someone she knew would bear witness. Foggy Point just wasn’t that big, and its selection of event worthy restaurants was limited.

James not only owned the restaurant Aiden had chosen but was also the head chef. There would be at least one witness.

Mr. Jones led Harriet from the parking lot to the door of the eatery, opening it and then handing her off to the hostess.

“I hope you’re having a wonderful time,” the thin redheaded woman said with a smile. “Your table is ready.”

She picked up a leather-bound menu and led Harriet to a table that overlooked the cove marina. Harriet tried to interpret the meaning of the single menu. Either Aiden was waiting at the table or, more likely, hadn’t arrived yet. Being a veterinarian, it wasn’t unusual for him to have to deal with last-minute emergencies.

Her stomach clenched as the hostess seated her at an otherwise unoccupied table.

The woman offered to bring her a drink, and Harriet asked for sparkling water with lemon. When fifteen minutes had passed without any sign of Aiden, a waiter—Joshua, he said—clad in black trousers and vest and a white open-necked shirt, brought a small white plate with thin-cut carrots and celery and several small pieces of cheese.

“Compliments of Chef James,” he said as he set it in front of Harriet. “Can I bring you anything else?”

“No, I’m good,” she mumbled. Anyone with eyes could see she wasn’t good, but Joshua left without saying anything.

At thirty minutes, Joshua brought warm crusty Kalamata olive bread and fresh butter. Harriet went to the ladies room and splashed cold water on her face, hoping her absence from the table would cause Aiden to arrive but knowing in her heart that she was indulging in magical thinking.

Forty-five minutes brought James to her table.

“Hi,” he said. “Do you mind?” He pointed at the chair opposite hers.

“Please,” she said, waving absently at the chair.

“This is awkward,” he began.

“Oh.” Harriet sat straighter. “Do you need this table?”

“No, no, I didn’t mean to suggest...I’m sorry, what I meant to ask is, can I do anything? Call someone? Dr. Jalbert made the reservations, and I assume he sent the limo for you, which means you’re stuck here until he shows.”

“You’re assuming he’s going to show,” Harriet said, her face flaming red.

“I’m sure he’s just been detained at the animal hospital,” James offered.

“And he’s alone, without a phone or anyone who could call for him?”

“I’m sorry,” James said again, and looked down at his hands.

They sat in silence for a moment.

“I didn’t bring my cell phone,” Harriet finally said.

“Would you like to use mine?”

“No. If he’s so busy he can’t call me, I’m not going to bother him.” A dark part of Harriet wondered if this had been the plan all along.

“I can take you home, if you’d like,” James offered.

“I can’t let you do that,” Harriet said. “You’ve got a restaurant to run. I’ll call my aunt or one of my friends. Do you mind if I sit here a few minutes to steel myself for the explanations?”

“At least stay long enough to eat. I cooked a special beef dish just for you.”

“I’m sorry, I can’t possibly eat dinner.”

“How about some Death by Chocolate?” he offered. “It might be just what you need.”

Harriet sighed.

“I’ll take that as a yes,” he said. “Be right back.”

True to his word, in less than five minutes, James came back with two dishes of the warm, dense chocolate cake.

“I hope it’s okay that I’m joining you,” he said.

“Thanks for not making me suffer through this alone.” She took a bite of cake.

“I’m sure there’s a reasonable explanation,” James started.

“Can we not talk about it?” Harriet took another bite of cake. “I’m going to have to go through all this until I’m ready to scream with the Loose Threads, and then I’ll still have Aiden to deal with whenever he surfaces. And frankly, at the moment, I can’t think of any excuse that’s going to make this okay.”

“Can you taste the hint of chili in the cake,” James asked her with a crooked smile.

“Tell me about it.”



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