



# Quilter's Knot

A HARRIET TRUMAN/LOOSE THREADS MYSTERY

Arlene Sachitano

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A Harriet Truman/Loose Threads Mystery

BY

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This book is dedicated to the late  
Doreen Morris

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## Chapter One

**T**ell me again why we have to go to a workshop with Lauren,” Harriet Truman said. “She blames me for her last quilt being ruined. And she’s the one who’s been copying TV cartoons for her images. You’d think she’d be thanking me for pointing it out—if I *had* pointed it out, which you may remember I didn’t. Bertrand probably did her a favor when he destroyed her Kathy the Kurious Kitty knock-off. Now she won’t be sued for plagiarism.” She brushed her hair away from her face.

“Now, honey,” Mavis Willis said and set her teacup down on the piecrust table in the sitting area of Harriet’s long-arm quilting studio. “Lauren knows you didn’t ruin her quilt. And she is trying to mend her ways. She was already in a two-year series in creative fiber design she’s finishing this year. She’s even signed up for the guild certification program. Her best work will be scrutinized by judges in London.

“We need to support that. Besides, it’ll be fun, and heaven knows we could use a little fun. And most of the Loose Threads are going.”

The Loose Threads was the quilting group Harriet’s Aunt Beth had belonged to forever and that Harriet had joined upon her return to Foggy Point, Washington.

“I’m not signing up for two years of anything,” Harriet said and punched the stop button on her long-arm quilting machine. “Besides, if Kathy the Kurious Kitty was the best she could come up with after a year of training, I’m not impressed with her school.”

“Oh, honey,” Mavis protested. “She made that cat quilt two years or more ago, before she started her schooling. She spent a lot of money making patterns before she knew better—she was hoping she could sell the patterns and get her money back. That’s why she was so sensitive about her quilt. She knew what it was.

“And in any case, the school doesn’t let students show their classwork outside the program until they graduate.”

Harriet ran her hand over the stitching she’d just completed and decided it would do. She crossed the room and flung herself into the leather wingback chair opposite her older friend.

“And, honey, the great part is,” Mavis continued, “you don’t need to sign up for a two-year program. The center has a set of week-long workshops they do a couple of times a year. They’ll be bringing in teachers from all over the country. That’s what we’re going to. It’ll be fun. You’ll see.”

“Do I have to send my work to London?” Harriet asked.

“Of course not. That’s just for the two-year program, and then only if you want that certificate.”

“What kind of classes do they have?”

Mavis poured hot water from an electric pot sitting on the table over the used tea bag in her floral china teacup.

“They have all sorts.” She pulled a folder from the canvas tote that held her current hand-stitching project. “Let’s see here.” She adjusted the tilt of her bifocals. “You could take hand piecing classes. There are several people teaching that. Marla Stevens is coming from Indiana to teach dye techniques.”

“Don’t you think it’s a little soon for me to be taking time off from the business?” Harriet asked. “I mean, it’s only been two months since I took over, and during those two months, Aiden’s mom was murdered and my studio was trashed and I was held at gunpoint—let’s not forget that part. I’m just now getting a normal routine going. I hate to upset the apple cart.”

Mavis folded back the cuff of her faded green-and-brown plaid flannel shirt. “That’s all true, but with the Loose Threads going to the workshop, your workload will be reduced, and your aunt Beth is willing to come out of retirement and stitch anything that has to be done. I asked her. The Wal-Mart in Port Angeles has tablecloths on sale, so Beth and I went yesterday to get pastel cloths for the



guild's mother-daughter tea. We were talking about the workshop, and she said since she's just back from her cruise and still getting settled into her new place, she was only going to come to the open house part. I asked her if she would be willing to cover any emergency stitching that needed doing, and she said of course she would, so there you have it. You're free to come."

Harriet wasn't sure she'd ever get used to having what felt like everyone in town not only knowing her business but planning her life. After having been raised by parents who only occasionally noticed she existed, she sometimes felt smothered by the attention of her aunt Beth, whom she'd lived with off and on during her childhood, and the Loose Threads. The fact that Foggy Point was a small town didn't help. With fewer than 10,000 people, it was also geographically isolated, exactly the feature that had caused Victorian sea captain and reputed pirate Cornelius Fogg to choose the area for his home base.

Located between Port Angeles and Sequim, Foggy Point itself was shaped like the head and front claw of a tyrannosaurus rex, which provided multiple lagoons and coves perfect for hiding the tall sailing ships that had plied the waters of the Strait of Juan de Fuca laden with treasure more than a century earlier. Just one road connected it to the highway, which meant winter storms often left the community cut off from the rest of the state. So, the local citizenry kept its collective nose firmly planted in each other's business.

"But Aunt Beth has only been retired for a couple of weeks. And she's not even unpacked."

Aunt Beth had given Harriet the large Victorian home that housed her long-arm quilting business, *Quilt As Desired*, along with said business, two months earlier when Beth had decided on the advice of her doctor to retire and enjoy life. She had purchased a small cottage on the strait side of Foggy Point then promptly left for a month-long cruise of Europe.

"You can talk to Beth yourself, but she agrees it would be good for you to get out and have some fun. Besides, you might meet potential customers. Look at it as a business trip."

Harriet knew she didn't need to talk to her aunt. Mavis was one of Beth's oldest and dearest friends. If Mavis said Aunt Beth was

willing, it was true.

She held out her hand for the brochure. "Let me look," she said.

The next hour passed in a blur of class descriptions and tea, but in the end, and with help from Mavis, Harriet had chosen a selection of workshop activities that would fill up her week of attendance. She set the registration form on her desk.

"I'll fax this in the morning," she said.

"Make sure to say you want to be with the other Loose Threads on the line where they ask for housing preferences, and note that they're at the quilting school," Mavis began gathering up her stitching and stowed it in her bag. "The school is for arts and crafts, not just quilting, so there will be other workshops going on at the same time. You could end up bunking with the painters or potters if you don't specify." She buttoned her shirt, which had belonged to her husband and doubled as her jacket, gathered her bag and purse and headed for the door. "I have to run. Look who's here."

Aiden Jalbert held the door as she stepped out.

Harriet tried unsuccessfully to change the fluttering in her stomach to anger. Aiden had no-showed for a dinner date three weeks before, and she hadn't heard from him since.

She reminded herself there was no reason she *should* have heard from him, given she had told him herself she was too old to date him. He was, after all, ten years her junior. Yet in spite of her logical self talk, her heart soared at the sight of him.

Strands of straight black hair fell over his forehead. He flicked a lock off his face, and she could see the dark circles under his odd white-blue eyes.

"Can I come in?" he asked and hesitated.

"Suit yourself," she said and continued straightening papers on her desk.

He collapsed his tall frame into the leather chair and closed his eyes. "Feels good to sit," he groaned, and her anger fled.

"Would you like a cup of tea?"

"What I'd like is to curl up with you and sleep for about a week," he said without opening his eyes. "Since that's not likely, I'll take the tea."

She crossed the room and checked the electric kettle; there was

enough water for one cup.

“You’re darn right it’s not likely.”

“There’s a good reason I didn’t show up for dinner.”

“You don’t owe me any explanations. Jorge told me you’d called, and he fixed me a chile relleno with a new sauce he’s working on and he ate dinner with me and it was fine.”

“I would have called you myself, but I was in the middle of something.”

“Look, it’s okay. I understand—things come up.” She pulled a ceramic mug from a shelf on the wall behind the wingback chair. “Lots of things, apparently, since that was three weeks ago.” She put a teabag in the cup and poured water over it.

“Do you read the newspaper?” Aiden asked and straightened in his chair.

“Are you trying to change the subject?”

“I’ll take that as a no.” He took the mug of steaming tea. “Because if you did read the paper or watch the local news, you’d know there’s been an epidemic of tainted pet food. We’ve got cats and dogs both going into kidney failure. All of us have been working round the clock, and we’ve still lost eight dogs and four cats.”

Harriet could see the toll that loss had taken etched into the lines on his face. “I don’t know what to say.”

“I’m sorry,” he said. “I shouldn’t be ragging on you. I should have found a minute to call. There’s no reason you *should* know what’s going on at the vet clinic.”

“I knew DeAnn’s dog had been in the hospital, but I didn’t realize you had so many others.”

“We have no way of predicting how bad this is going to get. I don’t think we’re out of the woods yet, but we’ve had a little slow-down this week. It’s probably temporary, but Dr. Johnson decided to go ahead and send me and one of the assistants to Angel Harbor to do a spay-neuter clinic he agreed to months ago.”

“You’ve got to be kidding,” Harriet said and sat down again.

“Why would I kid about a spay-neuter clinic?”

“It’s just that the Loose Threads are going to a quilting workshop in Angel Harbor next week.”

“Geez, doesn’t anyone in Foggy Point work? Besides you and me, of course.”

Aiden hadn't been living in town much longer than Harriet had, having spent several years in Africa doing vet work. Most of the members of the Loose Threads were a mystery to him.

"Well, Robin and DeAnn are stay-at-home moms. Connie and Mavis are retired, you knew that." She counted her quilt group friends on her fingers. "Sarah has some kind of job at a company that runs assisted-living facilities in the area. Her uncle owns the business, and Aunt Beth said Sarah's mom made her brother hire Sarah because she kept getting fired from other places because of her charm. I'm guessing he's happy to have her take as much vacation as she wants. The sad part is, she has her masters in sociology. She probably could do a good job if she could get over herself."

"What about Lauren?" he asked. "She must do something besides trying to sell unoriginal quilt patterns."

"As a matter of fact, she's apparently some kind of freelance designer in the high-tech industry. I think Aunt Beth said she designs microchips or something like that. She's self-employed, so she can take off whenever she doesn't have a pressing contract."

"Who would have guessed." He took a sip of tea and grinned. "Things are suddenly looking up. You're a Thread, aren't you?"

"I guess I am. In any case, I'm going."

"Will you let me take you out to dinner to make up for our missed date?"

"I'm just now signing up. I haven't talked to anyone but Mavis. I don't know how structured our evenings will be."

Aiden made a sad face.

"If it's possible, yes, I'll try again, if only to avoid having to watch a grown man cry."

## Chapter Two

**Are you sure you don't mind working again so soon?"** Harriet asked Aunt Beth the next morning as the two women sat in the sunny yellow kitchen. Harriet's fuzzy gray cat Fred wove between Aunt Beth's ankles under the table.

"It's no trouble. I had a full month to rest while I was on my European cruise." She wheeled her arm around. "My shoulder feels great, and besides, I think most of the Loose Threads are going to the workshop so no one will be breathing down my neck waiting for anything. And it'll give you a chance to network with other quilters from our area."

"Mavis said you'd say that. I guess I'll fax my registration in, then. This late maybe they won't have room for me, so it won't even matter."

The two women got up and passed through the door that connected the kitchen to the studio. Harriet picked up the registration form from her desk and pulled a fax cover sheet from the shelf behind the desk.

"Oh, I think they'll make room," Beth assured her. "They're already paying the teacher to appear, so the more people they cram into the class the more money they make."

"That sounds kind of harsh," Harriet said with a smile at her tell-it-like-it-is aunt.

"Wait until you get assigned a bed in the sleeping room that's ten flights of stairs up and is really an attic to the attic."

Harriet pulled her papers back from the fax machine.

Aunt Beth laughed. "I'm exaggerating. They only over-booked

us once and they got such an uproar they had to refund people's money, so they never did it again."

Harriet put the papers back into the fax machine and hit the send button.

"I'm still not sure I should be leaving," she said. "I'm just barely used to being back in Foggy Point. My mail still has yellow forwarding stickers on it." She paced the length of the workroom.

"Would you settle down? You aren't moving to the other side of the moon, you're just going to a workshop in Angel Harbor. It's only a two-hour drive from here and you're only going for a week."

"Two hours and a ferry ride," Harriet began unhooking the tension clips and loosening the roller from a yellow-and-white Sunbonnet Sue quilt on the long-arm machine. Aunt Beth had christened this particular machine "Mabel" when she'd purchased it as a replacement for "Gladys," her previous machine. Mabel's guide handles and stitching head reminded Harriet of the horned milk cows her boarding school in France had kept.

Aunt Beth had remodeled the parlor of her house to accommodate Gladys when she'd first started the long-arm quilting business more than ten years ago, and fortunately, she'd made the room large enough it had no trouble accepting Mabel's larger frame. The twelve-foot-long table could hold a king-sized quilt with no trouble, and its fifty-two-inch width gave Harriet lots of room to work any pattern her customers could imagine.

She finished unpinning the current project from the frame, spread it on her large cutting table and ran her hand over the surface, looking for threads that needed clipping. She had checked for threads on the back as she'd unrolled it from the machine, but she always checked both sides a second time on the flat table before folding up a quilt and returning it to its bag, just to be sure.

"Well, I'm going down to Pins and Needles," Beth announced. "Margaret is sending Carla to the workshop, and I want to buy the girl a sewing bag."

Margaret was the owner of Pins and Needles, Foggy Point's quilting store. She had hired Carla after she'd been laid off from her job at the Vitamin Factory, a business that had been owned and operated by Aiden's mother until her untimely death a few weeks prior. Harriet, too, had noticed the young single mother carried her

sewing supplies in a grocery sack.

“Here, let me make a donation,” she said, going back into the kitchen and rummaging in the coat closet, emerging with a black nylon duffel bag. “I got a new overnight bag when I went to Tacoma with Robin and DeAnn last week. Carla will need something to put her clothes in, too. This one...” She held up the bag. “...has a few more trips left in it.”

“That’s very kind of you,” Beth said, “I did raise you well, didn’t I?” Beth took the bag, picked up her purse and jacket and went out the door.

“Well, Fred, all I can say is it’s a good thing Aunt Beth can’t read minds, ’cause she wouldn’t think I was so nice if she knew what I was thinking about Lauren. That woman’s nuts if you ask me. And I still don’t see why we have to go reward her for bad behavior.”

Fred meowed once and went to the connecting door.

“It’s not lunch time yet,” Harriet told her furry friend and went back to start on the next project on her to-be-stitched shelf.

## Chapter Three

**H**arriet got up early on Monday morning. She showered and washed her hair before she came downstairs.

“Okay, Fred,” she said when she reached the kitchen, “Aunt Beth will come and check on you this afternoon. Your automatic feeder is full, but don’t eat it all in one sitting. Your water bowl is fresh, and Auntie will refresh it every day.” Fred wove between her legs, wiping his face on her slippers. “And I’ll leave my slippers by the door and you have my permission to have your way with them.”

“Who are you talking to?” Mavis asked as she came in. Her customary plaid flannel shirt had been replaced by a long, loose jacket in a rust-and-green batik fabric that accentuated the touches of auburn that still streaked her otherwise gray-white hair, worn with wide-legged black pants. “The studio was open, so I let myself in,” she added.

“I was just reviewing Fred’s instructions with him.” Harriet double-checked the stove burners and turned the overhead light off.

“Robin’s in the drive with the car running. Do you need help with your bags?”

“No, I’m not bringing much. Should I be?”

“Not the first time,” Mavis said and led the way to Robin’s blue mini-van.

In spite of her misgivings, Harriet enjoyed the trip to Angel Harbor. The drive through the cool dark forest always seemed magical. She found herself relaxing.



The women got out of the car on the big green-and-white ferry that carried them to Whidby Island. Harriet scanned the shiny water for signs of fins. She'd seen the orcas that swam the waters of the sound when she was little, but was still waiting to see them as an adult. She wanted to see if they were still as awe-inspiring or if her own diminutive size had been a factor.

"I don't know about you, but I've seen enough killers to last me a lifetime," Robin McLeod said as she, DeAnn and Sarah joined Harriet at the rail and learned what she was looking for. The group was still mourning the murder of their long-time member, Avanelle Jalbert.

"Amen to that," DeAnn agreed. "I think this week away will be very healing for all of us."

"I've heard this week will be very hard," Sarah Ness griped. "My friend Lillian took the workshop last year, and she said the teachers are very demanding."

"Great," said Harriet, "Something to look forward to."

The various members of the Loose Threads never failed to give her a look at all sides of any situation that came up. No matter what happened, Robin would exude the calm she gained through her daily meditation and yoga sessions. Sarah, the group narcissist, could be counted on to explain why anything that went on was really being done to her, for her or because of her. Mavis and, by proxy, Aunt Beth would have words of wisdom for her, and as long as Connie was along, she knew she would be well-hugged. Lauren would keep her humble, with her harsh opinions on everything. She didn't know DeAnn very well but hoped to remedy that this week, as they would be roommates. She had to admit, there were advantages to having moved back to Foggy Point, even if the price was giving up her anonymity.

"We better go back to the car," Robin said. "The ferry's going to be docking soon."

"Do you think Carla's going to survive riding with Sarah?" DeAnn asked her traveling companions once they were back in the car.

"She'll definitely know more about the life and times of Sarah Ness than anyone ought to," Mavis chuckled.



The Angel Harbor Folk Art Center consisted of three large pavil-

ions hidden in a stand of old growth forest five miles south of the community of Angel Harbor. The pavilions were large round buildings surrounded by a series of smaller outbuildings. Robin pulled her mini-van into the visitors parking area in front of Building B, the Fiber Arts Center.

“Let’s go get our room assignments and keys,” she said and got out of the car.

Harriet followed the other Loose Threads as they picked up their class schedules, room keys and meal tickets and returned to the car. Robin drove them down a narrow lane through the cool dark forest, parking in front of a cedar-shingled building that looked more like a grounded Tree House than a cottage.

“Wow,” she said as she got out of the car and had to tilt her head to see the top floors of the place she would call home for the next week.

“They’ve really done a nice job of blending their buildings into the woods,” DeAnn explained. “Our dorm is actually called The Tree House.” She breathed deeply of the damp, fragrant forest. “I love spending time here. It’s so peaceful I could stay forever.”

Inside, Harriet carried her overnight bag up a series of stairs that narrowed with each flight she ascended. She had checked the box on her registration that said she was able to climb stairs and realized now they were serious when they’d asked.

The rooms were paneled in rough cedar plank and were furnished with two single beds, two desks, night stands and lamps and a row of pegs under the window that looked out into the woods and divided the room into two identical halves. Their bathroom was down the hall, but at least they didn’t have to share it with anyone else. A vase of dried wild flowers sat on a small wooden stand near the door.

“How does it look?” Mavis asked when Harriet came back down the stairs.

“It looks cozy—I think the comforters are real goose down. You’d think they would have artistically handcrafted bed quilts.”

Mavis looked away.

“What?” Harriet asked.

“What Mavis doesn’t want to tell you is that the first floor rooms *are* filled with unique handcrafted items,” Robin said. “The

decorator hasn't gone upstairs yet."

"They probably don't tour prospective guests beyond the first floor," DeAnn said as she came down the stairs. "If the dried weed decoration in our room is any indication, these folks aren't rolling in money. Either that, or they pour their money into their art."

"What she's trying to say is, they're stingy with the heat and most meals are some kind of soup," Lauren informed them. "And be careful when you sit on the sofa in front of the fireplace. Its springs are killer."

Count on Lauren to hit the low points, Harriet thought.

"Come on, ladies, we should go on down to the fiber arts pavilion—new student orientation will start in..." Mavis glanced at her watch. "...fifteen minutes, and if she has to lecture Carla and Harriet on punctuality it will be that much longer until we get our tea."

The women gathered their purses and sweaters and left the Tree House.

"Who is *she*, and does she lecture a lot?" Harriet whispered to DeAnn as they walked along the wooded path that led to their destination.

"*She* is Selestina Bainbridge, the head of the fiber arts department and owner of the whole shebang," DeAnn replied, and waved her arms to indicate the woods around them. "Legend has it she inherited it from her husband who died years ago in the arms of his lover at the no-tell motel out by the highway. Apparently, he was sent to meet his maker by the lover's unforgiving spouse."

"So she doesn't have any issues, right?" Harriet said with a laugh.

DeAnn just rolled her eyes skyward.

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