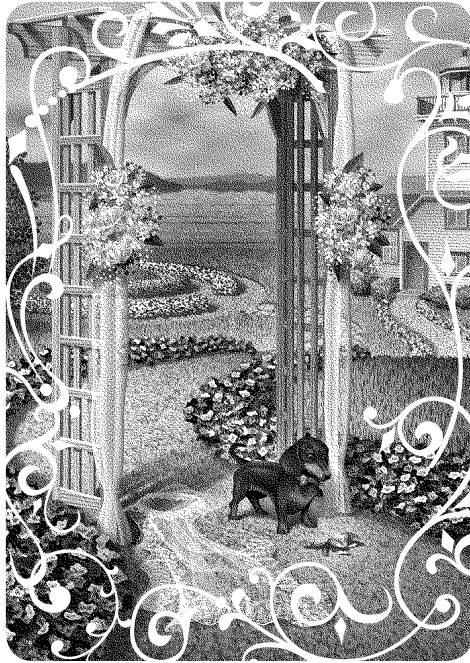


Bloomed to Die





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1



The murmur of cheerful voices, interspersed with laughter, trailed behind Kaylee Bleu as she examined the new shrubbery encircling the Old Cape Lighthouse. The other Petal Pushers, who had welcomed Kaylee with open arms when she moved to Turtle Cove the previous spring, knelt along the path to the keeper's cottage as they placed antique ship lanterns among the freshly planted pink and white begonias.

She should be helping them instead of going off on her own. But she needed a few moments of solitude to soothe her nerves. This was the biggest, most important event she'd taken on since buying The Flower Patch from her grandmother. However, Bea Lyons was on a monthlong transatlantic cruise with her sister, so she wasn't available to help or offer advice. The shop's reputation now rested solely on Kaylee's inexperienced shoulders.

The vibrant beauty of the *Ribes sanguineum* shrubs brightened the lighthouse foundation, but they wouldn't have been her choice. True, the clusters of deep pink flowers looked lovely against the gleaming white of the freshly painted lighthouse. But flowering currants thrived near forests, not here along the coast. At least the groom had chosen a native plant, even if it was out of place in the sea air.

Kaylee groaned inwardly when she thought about what might happen to the poor plants after the wedding day. The groom's wish may be her command, but it had also required her to transplant the bushes in summer while they were in full bloom instead of during dormancy as was recommended. Hopefully they would survive beyond the nuptials.

Kaylee deadheaded a few brown flowers and placed them in a bag she had attached to her belt.

“No debris allowed,” she said under her breath. Not that it mattered. Only Bear was close enough to hear her. “And no expense spared. Isn’t that right?”

The six-year-old dachshund sat up on his hind legs and barked his agreement. Kaylee scratched the top of his head, and his cheery polka dot bow tie bobbed as he leaned into her fingers. She laughed as he lost his balance and toppled over. A second later he was on his feet again and bouncing around like a rubber ball.

“We think alike, you and me,” Kaylee said. “What was already here only needed a little tender loving care and a bit of pruning.”

After a typical frigid winter and rainy spring, the foundation shrubs had been bedraggled and weathered. Then someone—probably a well-meaning volunteer—got carried away with the pruning. Since then, Kaylee had crossed her fingers for the shrubs, but to no avail. Not wanting to see the destruction of healthy plants, even if they appeared sparse and untidy, she had avoided the lighthouse when the nursery workers replaced them with these new bushes.

“And time,” she reluctantly admitted to Bear. “They needed more time to recover than we have, since the wedding is tomorrow.”

Bear didn’t seem to share her gloom. Instead he rolled on his back, scratching his long body against the manicured blades of grass and waving his legs in the air. Kaylee half-heartedly wished she could plop on the ground with the same joyous abandon. If only she were still six and could get away with it.

Bea had a photograph of Kaylee—she must have been about that age—showing her sprawled on the lighthouse lawn, arms and legs all akimbo. It was a happy picture, a reminder of her idyllic childhood.

Kaylee had found the photo in an album a few months ago. Her grandmother had left it behind, along with other albums and family memorabilia, when she sold her business and home to her granddaughter.

The Flower Patch, Wildflower Cottage, and the photographs now belonged to Kaylee. Before Bea moved to Arizona to live with her sister, she had handed Kaylee the keys and christened her the keeper of their family history.

Perhaps it was time to take that role seriously. She should sort through the photos, arrange them in albums, maybe even frame a few. She could create a family tree collage. Draw it on—

“Yoo-hoo! Kaylee!”

The cheerful call cut into Kaylee’s thoughts. She turned toward the voice and smiled.

Brooke Edgars walked toward her, both hands clasped around her fiancé’s arm. The young couple, in their mid- to upper twenties, could have stepped from a fashion magazine cover spread. The skirt of Brooke’s floral sundress swirled around her bare legs. Golden sandals strapped across slender feet and revealed the bright pink of her toenail polish.

This was the new Brooke, who had money to spend on clothes and fancy shoes and pedicures, but still shopped sales. She embraced the perks of having Orcas Island’s most eligible bachelor fall in love with her, but she refused to abandon her roots.

Her fiancé was James Stratford: millionaire, descendent of early settlers, and destroyer of healthy shrubs.

“I’m so glad to see you here, Kaylee,” Brooke said. “Isn’t this the most romantic place in the world to have a wedding?”

“I’m sure it must be.” Kaylee looked around. “As you can see, we’re getting it spruced up.”

“About time too.” James was more casually dressed than Brooke, wearing khaki shorts and boat shoes. He held a sleek

silver travel mug in his free hand. "Since the rehearsal dinner is tonight."

"This is the first chance we've had to be out here," Kaylee said. "Thankfully, the sun decided to shine today."

"I ordered it to." James beamed at Brooke. "Everything needs to be perfect for our special day."

From the expression on James's face, he adored his bride. Apparently even a snobbish know-it-all could be smitten.

Feeling a little guilty about her earlier thoughts, Kaylee waved her hand in the direction of the new shrubs. "It was very generous of you to donate all this landscaping."

"I just can't tell you enough how much we appreciate you and the other Petal Pushers," Brooke said, barely taking a breath. "Getting your fingers dirty and putting in all this effort to make everything look beautiful. I know tomorrow is going to be the most perfect day."

"We're happy to help however we can," Kaylee said. "After all, you're an honorary Petal Pusher now."

A shadow seemed to cross James's face, but it quickly disappeared as he flipped open the lid and sipped from his cup.

Kaylee mentally rehashed what she had said, but couldn't imagine she'd inadvertently caused offense. Maybe she had only imagined his brief annoyance.

"I couldn't ask for better friends." Brooke released James's elbow long enough to squeeze Kaylee's arm. "When I moved back here, the Petal Pushers welcomed me with the warmest hospitality and friendship. It was almost like I'd never left. And I'm so glad my grandmother was one of the founding members so I can tag along with the rest of you once in a while."

Kaylee couldn't help a smile as she remembered her own warm welcome into the charming community. It hadn't been that long since she made her own move to this cheery little town.

At the time, losing her teaching position at Seattle's University of Washington had been devastating. But now she was thankful she got to spend her days designing floral arrangements instead of writing lesson plans, and pass her nights with a good book instead of grading a stack of papers.

Bea had been a Petal Pusher all of Kaylee's life. Now her grandmother's friends were her own.

"I know exactly how you feel," Kaylee said. She looked past Brooke's shoulder. "Speaking of the Petals, here comes Jess."

With her typical enthusiastic smile, Jessica Roberts approached them with a bounce in her step. She was about ten years older than Kaylee and owned the Death by Chocolate bakery next door to The Flower Patch. In the past few months, the two women had become especially close friends.

Jessica greeted everyone then turned to Brooke. "I finished the gourmet truffles for tonight's rehearsal dinner earlier this morning. How about a tasting?"

Brooke shrugged one dainty shoulder as she smiled at James. "What do you say, sweetheart? Would you like a taste of chocolate to go with that tea?"

James paused before answering, as if the question required his fullest concentration.

"I think the honey in this tea is enough sugar for me. Why don't you go along without me?" he suggested. "Since I'm already here, I want to go up to the widow's walk." He gestured toward the top of the lighthouse with the silver cup. "Look over my domain."

"Your domain?" Kaylee asked, unable to hide the "did I hear you right?" surprise in her voice.

"He's teasing," Brooke said with a girlish giggle. "Aren't you, sweetheart?"

"Sure I am." He chuckled, but the falsity of the sound grated against Kaylee's skin. She didn't know what it was about James,

but she couldn't like the man. She'd tried, she really had. But then something always happened. He may not have meant it, but his attitude made her feel more like an indentured servant instead of a good friend who was arranging their wedding flowers.

Apparently Bear shared her feelings. When James first appeared, the dachshund had toddled behind Kaylee on his short legs and stayed there. His rounded body pressed against the back of her shoes.

"Run along now," James said, disengaging himself from Brooke's clasp and kissing her cheek. "I'll come by in—" he paused to make a show of gazing at his substantial gold wristwatch "—say, half an hour."

"See you then, sweetheart," Brooke said. "Kaylee, would you like to come with us? I'm sure the truffles are decadent."

"No thank you. I still have a few more bushes to clean up. But remember to bring your grandmother's lace handkerchief by The Flower Patch later so I can incorporate it into your bouquet."

"I won't forget. Everything about this wedding is going to be perfect."

Kaylee and Jessica managed to exchange an amused glance without Brooke or James seeing them. Though Kaylee wasn't fond of James, without a doubt he was a lucky man to have won the heart of a woman as genuine and kind as Brooke. She knew Jessica felt the same way about the bride-to-be.

Brooke tore her attention from her fiancé and looped her arm through Jessica's. "Shall we go? I'm dying to taste those chocolates."

James watched the two women walk away, took another sip from his cup, and faced Kaylee. "My bride doesn't realize how busy she'll be after our wedding. Between dinner parties and entertaining out-of-town guests, she's not going to have time for your little garden club. What's it called? Pedal Puzzlers?"

"Petal Pushers," Kaylee corrected.

"Ah well. To-may-to, to-mah-to."

"Not exactly." After all, no gardening club would go by the name of Pedal Puzzlers. That sounded more like a cycling group that solved brainteasers. She tried not to laugh at the mental image that thought conjured up. Good thing she'd found that spark of humor too, because James's superiority had once again needled.

Green eyes weren't the only thing Kaylee had inherited from her Irish mother. She also had an Irish temper, though she usually managed to keep it under control.

"Shouldn't Brooke be the one to make that decision?" she asked sweetly.

"It's not a question of decision, but of time." James stressed the last word as if he were explaining the concept to a class of kindergarteners. "As my wife, her schedule will be extremely crowded."

"I hope it's never too crowded for her friends." The cheer Kaylee forced into her voice barely lightened her tone. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I need to get back to work. We don't want any brown flowers to mar the wedding day."

"Nothing must spoil it."

Kaylee gave him a grim smile and walked away with Bear close on her heels. James didn't move.

"It *was* my domain once, you know," he called after her. Kaylee pivoted to face him, a quizzical look on her face.

"Excuse me?"

"That is, it belonged to my family. Practically everything the eye could see from the top of that lighthouse."

She shouldn't say it—she knew she shouldn't. But she couldn't resist.

"And yet," she said calmly, "my father's tribe, the Quinault, were here even before that."

She didn't wait for his response, but strode away with as much dignity as her pounding heart allowed. Later she'd come

back to the section of shrubbery she'd been working on before James and Brooke had interrupted her. For now, she needed to channel the poised nobility of her father's ancient people and quell the fiery energy of her mother's.

Once she was out of James's sight, Kaylee plopped on the ground. Immediately Bear hopped into her lap. She gratefully endured his doggy kisses, then straightened his colorful bow tie.

"Can anyone join this party?"

Kaylee glanced up then shaded her eyes against the sun. "Sure. Have a seat."

DeeDee Wilcox, who lived and breathed whodunits as the owner of *Between the Lines* mystery bookstore, gracefully lowered herself to the ground. "What did the irrepressible Mr. Stratford do now?"

"How do you know he did anything?"

"Didn't you know? I'm an expert in body language cues."

"Must come from reading all those mysteries you sell."

"Guess so." DeeDee plucked a blade of grass and twiddled it between her fingers. "I didn't hear the conversation, but it obviously wasn't a pleasant one."

Kaylee settled Bear in her lap and recounted the exchange. As she talked, she slid her hand along Bear's back. The feel of his smooth coat and the warmth of his body quieted her jangled nerves.

"Then I told him my father's family was here first," Kaylee concluded.

"You didn't." DeeDee clapped a hand to her mouth, her eyes sparkling.

"Maybe not in those exact words."

"No wonder he didn't answer me when we passed each other."

"Where did he go?"

"Inside the lighthouse." DeeDee's musical laugh lingered

in the air. "I guess he meant it when he told you he was going to survey his domain from the widow's walk."

"He's probably going up there to spy on us while we finish the landscaping," Kaylee replied. "After all, everything has to be—" "Perfect," they said together then laughed.

When the laughter faded, a pleasant silence surrounded them. As if by tacit agreement, they stood and gazed toward the shore. After several days of nonstop rain, it felt luxurious to relax in the sunshine.

DeeDee bent down and plucked another blade of grass. "Is something bothering you, Kaylee?"

Startled at the question, Kaylee automatically shook her head. "Why do you ask?"

"It's what you said to James." DeeDee gave a small laugh. "It was funny, and he definitely deserved the comeback. But you're not usually a comeback kind of gal. I mean that as a compliment."

Kaylee focused her gaze on the ocean waters of West Sound that separated the bulk of Orcas Island from its westernmost peninsula. On the horizon, the shoreline of Deer Harbor rose above the waves, the blues and greens of sea and the browns and greens of land shimmering in the afternoon sunlight.

DeeDee was right. Kaylee seldom thought of a good retort right away. Even when she did, she usually kept it to herself. Something was bothering Kaylee. She might not be the bride, but all the plans for Brooke's perfect nuptials had given her pre-wedding jitters. That, and the fear that she'd fail. She never wanted her grandmother to regret selling The Flower Patch to her.

Suddenly Bear jumped up and raced as fast as his short legs would carry him to a flower bed near the foundation shrubbery.

"What in the world?" Kaylee rose to her knees.

As Bear disappeared into the bushes, DeeDee said, "I'm glad we haven't planted new flowers in that one yet."

Bear reappeared and proudly trotted back to the women, something gold and shiny hanging from his mouth. As he drew nearer, Kaylee shifted her gaze from Bear to the widow's walk high above her, but she couldn't see much of anything from this angle.

"What does he have?" DeeDee asked.

Kaylee scooped up the dachshund and removed the golden object from his mouth. "It's James's watch."

2



Kaylee glanced from the watch back to the widow's walk. She almost expected to see James peering over the wooden railing.

"You'd think he'd take better care of his possessions," Kaylee said. She examined the watch. "The glass covering the face is cracked now."

"Any tooth marks from Bear?" DeeDee held out her hand. "Let me see it."

After Kaylee placed it in her palm, DeeDee looked it over. "Perhaps he has a wardrobe of watches. If he doesn't want this one anymore, I'll take it home to Andy."

"What about finders keepers?" Kaylee joked. "It'd make a fancy collar for this little guy." She scooped up Bear and scratched behind his ears. "You'd like a gold watch collar, wouldn't you, boy?"

DeeDee chuckled and held the watch up to Bear's neck. "You'll need to add a few links first. Or put Bear on a diet."

"He has gotten a little chubby, hasn't he?"

"Just a smidge. Probably from begging too many treats from the tourists."

"He is popular." Kaylee occasionally wondered if the island's visitors came into the shop only to get acquainted with Main Street's favorite dog. But since almost all of them left with a purchase, she wasn't about to complain.

"I think I've been eating too many treats too," Kaylee continued. "Sometimes I wish Jessica's bakery wasn't next door to my flower shop. At least you have to cross the street."

DeeDee gave a good-natured snort. "As if that makes any difference."

"Every little bit of walking makes a difference." Still holding Bear, Kaylee took a few steps away from the lighthouse to get a better view of the widow's walk. If she had dropped a fancy watch while up there, she'd be looking over the railing. But there was still no sign of James.

"Odd, don't you think?" Kaylee mused.

"What's that?" DeeDee asked.

Kaylee gestured upward. "That James hasn't shouted to us. Warned us not to run off with his watch."

"We still could." A good-natured glint appeared in DeeDee's grayish-blue eyes. "Shall we make a run for it?"

"You and I know we're both too sweet and innocent to get away with that. Besides, James is probably on his way down."

"Or maybe he didn't realize he dropped it." DeeDee held out the watch to Kaylee.

Kaylee took the watch and glanced at the face again. The fall had apparently stopped the hands at exactly 11:21. For a reason she couldn't explain, a shiver ran up her spine. She returned her gaze to the widow's walk. A cloud had slipped in front of the sun, and a gray shadow dimmed the lighthouse.

"I think I'll take it up to him. Want to come along?"

"No thanks." DeeDee drew back in exaggerated horror. "Too many stairs for me."

"Come on. I haven't been up there since I moved here. It'll be fun." Kaylee made her voice sound as enticing as possible. "We can look over the Stratford domain."

"You're on your own, girlfriend."

Kaylee rubbed her chin against Bear's head. "I guess it's just you and me, kiddo."

"You can leave him with me if you want. I'll keep an eye on him."

"Thanks, but I'll take him. It'll be an adventure. And he could use the exercise."

"I hope he thinks so." DeeDee chuckled, then tickled the underside of Bear's long snout. "Wave to me when you get there."

"Will do."

With Bear nestled in her arms, Kaylee entered the lighthouse through the rear door of the keeper's cottage and made her way to the front entryway. She gazed up the circular stairwell but didn't see any sign of James. Nor did she hear any footsteps.

"I guess we're going up," she said quietly to Bear. "I hope my legs get us there because I don't think yours will."

About halfway up, Kaylee leaned her back against the wall and sat on the broadest width of the step. Bear wriggled out of her arms and managed to climb three more stairs before turning and staring at her. He cocked his head to one side as if to say, "What are you waiting for? There are more steps to climb. Adventure awaits!"

"Give me a minute to catch my breath, Bear. I should have carried a bottle of water with me instead of you."

Bear barked, scrambled up two more steps, and barked again. A slight echo resounded in the stairwell.

"I'm coming." Kaylee took a deep breath, then followed Bear up the stairs. His plump rear end wiggled as his back legs scrambled to get up each step. Kaylee waited patiently, appreciating his slower speed. If they moved at a leisurely pace, she reasoned, perhaps James would tire of playing "lord of all I see." Then she could return the watch without climbing all the way to the top, thereby conserving energy she needed for her work.

"Though I guess we shouldn't give up now," she said to Bear. "After all, DeeDee is waiting for us to wave to her. Let's get a move on."

She scooped up the dachshund and quickened her pace. When she reached the top and stepped out on the widow's walk,

a freshening breeze from the sea cooled her cheeks. She inhaled the familiar scent, drawing it deep into her lungs then smiled so widely her cheeks hurt. The walk encircled the lighthouse tower, and James was out of sight on one side or the other. He could wait a moment or two more for his watch. For now, Kaylee only wanted to take in the spectacular view.

The warmth of the sun's rays invigorated her tired muscles. The lovely blues and untamed whites of the sky and the sea spread before her in panoramic glory. Waves crashed upon the beach, reaching and receding, reaching and receding. The tidal pull seemed to tug at something deep inside Kaylee, an ancestral memory of her father's people in their canoes upon that sea, upon that beach.

She laughed at her fancifulness, amused by her own giddiness at being so high above the earth.

The view was worth every single step on every single stair.

A movement on the beach caught her attention. Someone was running across the sand. The runner veered inland, following a path among the wild grasses.

After she watched the figure disappear, Kaylee turned her face to the sky to soak up more warmth. Up here, so high above the ground, worries shrank against the vast expanse of sky and sea. As far as the eye could see, all seemed well with the world.

Perhaps that's how James felt too. Maybe it wasn't the island he was claiming for his own, but the experience of being a part of something grander than oneself.

Bear squirmed, pulling Kaylee from her thoughts. "Or maybe he's a greedy snob," she said, but with a lilt in her voice that softened the words. "Let's find him, shall we? Which way do you suppose he went?"

Bear pranced in a tight circle, let out a cheerful yip, and scurried on his short legs around the top of the lighthouse.

“Wait for me,” Kaylee called as the tip of his tail disappeared from her view.

A short second later, Bear’s anxious barking broke the morning tranquility.

Kaylee picked up her pace. She rounded the curve and gasped.

James was sprawled on the walk, one hand clutching his shirt. His other arm stretched outward, his fingers reaching for the silver travel mug he’d been carrying. It lay against the lighthouse wall, and dark liquid stained the planks. Bear carried the lid in his mouth as he paced between James’s fingers and his head, leaving tracks where he’d walked through the spilled beverage.

Conflicting thoughts crashed in Kaylee’s mind, rooting her feet to the boardwalk. Her forensic training shuddered at Bear’s movements—he was disturbing the scene—but another part of her brain refused to believe what she was seeing. Any second now, James would sit up. Or groan. He’d do something.

But he didn’t.

Reconnecting with reality, Kaylee didn’t have to get any closer to know for sure: The groom was dead.

Bear dropped the lid. He barked softly, then poked at James’s ear with his nose.

“No, Bear,” Kaylee said quietly. “Leave him alone.”

Bear whimpered then lay down, resting his long nose on his front legs. He whimpered again.

Kaylee approached James and knelt next to his body. She placed a comforting hand on Bear’s back then turned her attention to James. His face appeared contorted as if in pain, and his eyes stared at the sky.

“James,” Kaylee whispered, even though she knew he couldn’t hear her. She needed to call 911. To get paramedics here.

Brooke.

Someone had to tell Brooke.

Rapid-fire thoughts pounded against Kaylee's brain. She pulled her phone from her pocket, trying not to stare at James.

Even as she dialed, she knew the paramedics could do nothing for him now. But she could.

She leaned forward and gently closed his eyes, then sat back on her heels and prayed while she waited for someone to answer her call.



Kaylee and DeeDee waited for help near the doorway to the widow's walk, their backs against the lighthouse wall. Bear rested in Kaylee's lap.

After calling 911, Kaylee had phoned DeeDee, telling her about James and asking her not to say anything to anyone else. Not yet. The news would spread quickly enough—that's the way it was in a small town—but hopefully not until someone had a chance to talk to Brooke.

"I still can't believe it," DeeDee said. "James Stratford is dead. How is that possible?"

DeeDee had asked the same question, in different words, more than once since appearing on the widow's walk out of breath. But Kaylee didn't have an answer.

"I guess you never know," DeeDee continued. "He was young and healthy and still . . ." She shook her head. "Poor Brooke."

Kaylee started to answer, then tucked Bear beneath her arm. "I hear sirens. They're coming."

Both women stood and looked over the railing. From their vantage point, they could see the road leading into the parking lot. The emergency vehicles came into view.

Kaylee looked down. Only a little while ago, she'd been

tending the new shrubbery and talking to James and Brooke, the happily-in-love couple who expected to spend the rest of their lives together.

Now their perfect wedding would never happen.

"Here they are," DeeDee said, pointing toward the lot.

Sheriff Eddie Maddox, tall and physically fit despite nearing sixty, strode toward the keeper's cottage. Deputy Nick Durham, about fifteen years younger than the sheriff, followed close behind. Two EMTs, carrying a stretcher and medical bags, brought up the rear.

Kaylee and DeeDee returned to the body, and it wasn't long before the officers and the EMTs joined them. Everyone murmured greetings, and then the older EMT knelt beside James and checked for a pulse. He gazed at the sheriff and shook his head.

"What happened here?" Sheriff Maddox asked.

"We don't know." Kaylee hugged Bear a little tighter and he whimpered. "James told me he was coming up here to—" She stopped and shot a glance at DeeDee. The exact words didn't matter, nor did James's arrogance. Not anymore.

"He said he wanted to look around," Kaylee continued. "DeeDee and I were chatting, and then Bear shows up with James's watch. I guess it fell. I mean, it must have. He'd been wearing it."

Aware that shock was making her babble, she pulled the watch from her pocket and handed it to the sheriff. After examining the watch, he dropped it into the evidence bag Nick held open for him.

"You're sure Stratford was wearing it?"

"He checked the time when we were talking. I saw it."

"Then what happened?"

"He didn't come down, so eventually I came up." Kaylee closed her eyes to block out the horrific memory of that first glimpse of his body. "He was like this when I came up here."

"Did you touch him?"

"I closed his eyes."

"Anything else?"

"Bear had the lid to the cup in his mouth, but I didn't touch it. Eventually he put it down by himself." She fiddled with Bear's bow tie and realized the fabric was wet. Probably from James's tea. She wiped her damp fingers on her shorts. "All I did was call 911. And then DeeDee."

"Call anyone else?"

"No one." She met his gaze. "He's engaged, you know. He was supposed to get married tomorrow."

"I'd heard that."

Of course he had. Everyone on Orcas Island knew their millionaire bachelor had finally been caught in a nuptial net.

"Someone needs to tell Brooke."

"Someone will."

The sheriff glanced at the body then sighed heavily. "Any idea about cause of death?" he asked the older EMT.

"Can't say without an autopsy."

Sheriff Maddox exchanged a meaningful glance with his deputy, who nodded and stepped away to make a phone call.

"Ladies, we need to treat this as a crime scene." Before either of the women could respond, he held up both hands, palms facing them. "No doubt, Mr. Stratford died of natural causes, but we still have procedures to follow. If the autopsy reveals that it was murder, we will need as much information from the scene as we can get."

Bear's sausage-like body tensed in Kaylee's arms then seized. The convulsions surprised her so much she almost dropped him. She cradled him closer, her heart racing and her thoughts in a panic. The younger EMT was suddenly beside her. He took Bear from her shaking arms.

“Has he ever done this before, ma’am?”

Kaylee tried to speak but no words came out. She numbly shook her head.

The EMT pressed his fingers gently against Bear’s chest. “He needs a vet. Now.”

“What’s wrong with him?”

“Can’t say for sure.” The EMT gazed into Kaylee’s eyes. “But I think he’s been poisoned.”