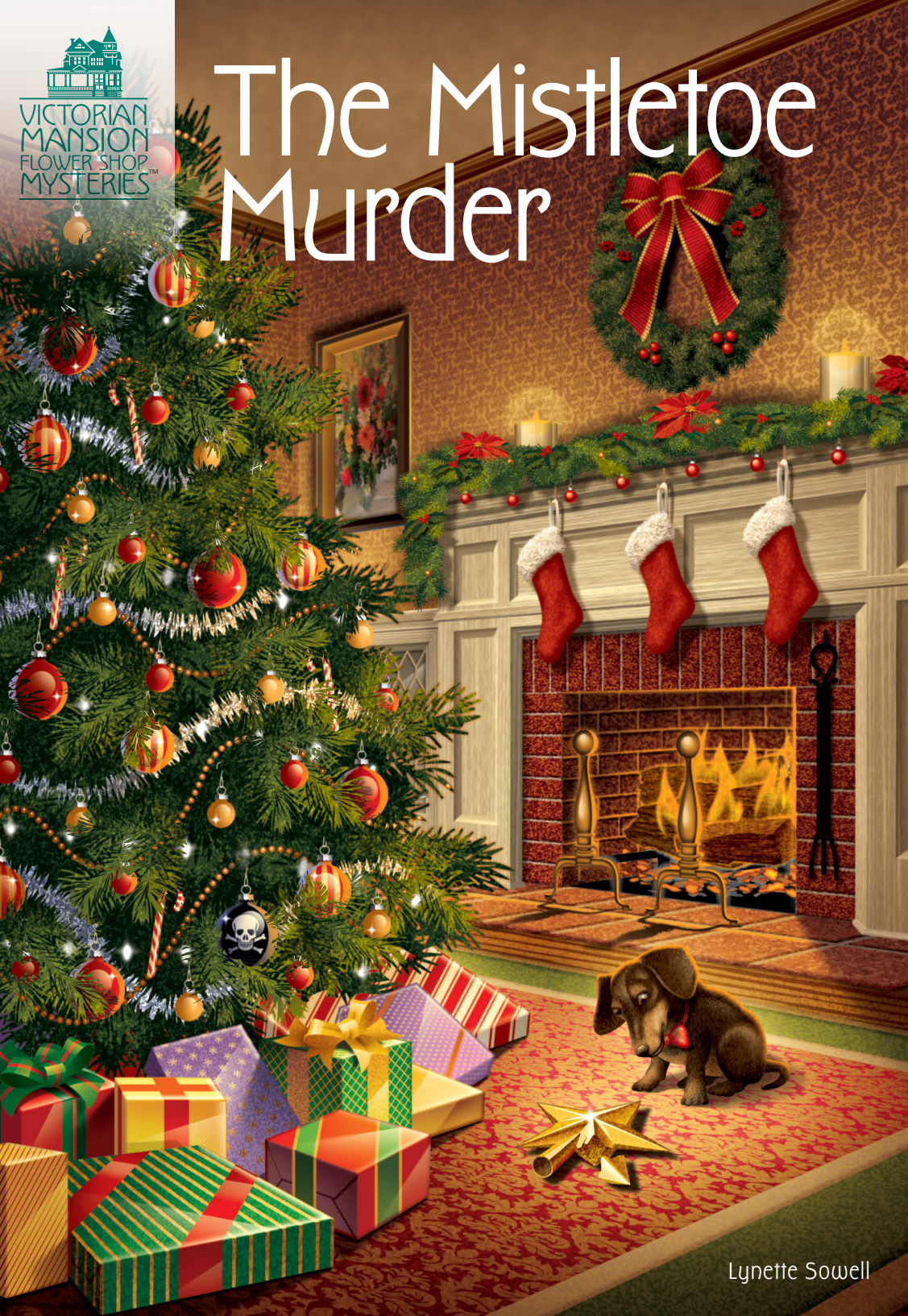


# The Mistletoe Murder





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Lynette Sowell

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*The Mistletoe Murder*

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# 1



The sound of Christmas music filtered into the study at Turtle Cove Mansion where Kaylee Bleu clutched several spools of velvety ribbon in shades of blue and silver. She smiled at the prospect of her design for this historic room, once a place where the gentleman of the house would entertain friends and perhaps enjoy a cigar or two. The room's austere tones would be brightened for Christmas, not in somber tones of red and green but in cheery blues and silver.

She could hardly wait to see it come to life.

Kaylee served on the committee for the House of Christmas Trees open house and auction, and she hoped their first event would be a resounding success. All the money raised—from ticket sales to tours of the century-old mansion to the auction of decorations and trees in each of the rooms—would go to a brand-new scholarship fund for local high school seniors.

She knew the value of a good education. She had been a plant taxonomy professor at the University of Washington in Seattle before she moved to Turtle Cove, Washington, with her loyal and inquisitive dachshund, Bear. When Kaylee lost her job due to cutbacks, she purchased The Flower Patch, her grandmother's shop, along with Wildflower Cottage, her grandmother's quaint farmhouse nestled in fields of lavender on Orcas Island.

Floral design was in her blood after learning the craft from her grandmother, Bea Lyons. So were plant taxonomy and botany, neither of which would come in handy while decorating a mansion for Christmas. But this event would let her show the island that The Flower Patch was in good hands with its new

owner. Kaylee knew she had much to live up to, and she didn't want to disappoint her grandmother, now happily retired and basking in the Arizona sunshine with her sister.

She took a seat on the wingback chair and picked up a sketch pad, making notes as she did so. Pinecones, silver ferns. Another display with the *Euphorbia pulcherrima*, or poinsettias as most people called them, in a special shade of blue. Something for the mantel that could be removed and transported to a lucky bidder's home after the auction, which was in less than two weeks.

Laughter and chatter in the mansion's grand entryway clamored for her attention, but she ignored the noise. She preferred quiet while she was in design mode. Big personalities in small spaces didn't help fuel her creativity. But the mansion was plenty large enough for her and the other designers not to bump into each other . . . much.

At least she hoped so after last night's reception when she'd met the other designers. They had snacked on hors d'oeuvres and sipped punch while introducing themselves and sharing their ideas for their respective rooms in the mansion to the scholarship committee.

Kaylee wasn't sure who on the committee had recruited Duncan McTavish. She'd heard of temperamental designers, but Duncan's carefree, almost haphazard, ways were just as bad. Clad in a Hawaiian shirt and cargo shorts even though it was December, Duncan had arrived an hour late via skateboard, looking ready for a clambake. He pushed to the front of the line to describe his vision for his room, then said that he might not even execute that design because he didn't want to be predictable.

While Duncan made them laugh with some of his jokes, Kaylee didn't miss the thinly veiled exasperation a few others had for his antics. Rumor had it that he'd never finished high

school, had wandered around various surfing competitions, then took up sand sculpting, and one day plunged headfirst into interior design.

Focus had also swirled around the arrival of Kristopher Carroll, a prominent designer in the Pacific Northwest. He had recently shot the pilot of *Celebrate with Kris*, his own cable TV design show. It was set to premiere this spring. The jovial man had a head of white hair with matching beard, and his booming laugh only lacked a “ho ho ho.” Kaylee had seen Kris and fellow designer Barbara Lang-Masters out and about Orcas Island for several months, so she wasn’t surprised he’d volunteered to design the grand entry hall of the mansion. The pair was inseparable throughout the evening, talking quietly and grinning at each other.

Barbara bragged about her more than two decades of design experience, and she emphasized that no one would see her designs for the immense dining room in the mansion until the very last moment. Despite Barbara’s reputation as a diva, people raved about her designs for their vacation homes throughout the San Juan Islands. Kaylee suspected Barbara was counting on this open house and auction to boost her career beyond the islands and onto the mainland.

“Just get through the next two weeks,” Kaylee kept telling herself. “It’ll be good for the shop.”

She held up three spools of ribbon to the orangey light of the study. Each shade definitely looked different than when viewed in the light at The Flower Patch’s workroom. Good thing she’d brought all of them with her this morning. Her original choice of a grayish silver ribbon would appear almost brown in this light.

“Kaylee Bleu?”

She turned around as a camera flashed. She just knew she’d been caught with her mouth open. “Yes?”

“Mac Jordan, *Puget Sound Chronicle*.” The bespectacled young



man grinned. "I'm here to get a few photos of you designers in action for our preview piece."

"Thank you for coming," Kaylee said. An Orcas Island news reporter had spoken with the designers last night, and a reporter from the local newspaper had already interviewed them. Kaylee had been wondering if and when the rest of the media they'd invited would show up.

Mac glanced down at his camera screen. "Hmm, let's get a few more shots, shall we?"

Kaylee nodded. "Sure."

"How about you unwind some of the ribbons and pose by the fireplace as if you're planning an arrangement for the mantel?" he suggested.

"Good idea." Kaylee approached the mantel, a large beam of mahogany brought all the way from North Carolina a century ago. It would provide an excellent place for an evergreen bough covered with white LED mini-lights and festooned with blue ribbon. She hadn't decided whether to go with silver or white accents yet. Maybe that would be a last-minute decision, depending on whether there was a fresh blanket of snow on the ground on the day of the event.

Kaylee unspooled the ribbons, letting them billow in curls to the parquet floor. "There. How's that?" She held the ribbons up to the mantel and made a mental note to measure the width of the wood to see if it was wide enough to support evergreen branches.

Mac took a series of pictures. "Great. Do you know when Mr. Carroll will arrive?"

When the subject of the open house came up, everyone usually asked about Kristopher Carroll first. No wonder some of the other designers' egos were ruffled occasionally. None of them cared to share the spotlight, let alone see another designer be propelled to the front and center.

"No. But he should be here by now. We were supposed to arrive no later than nine." Kaylee smiled, trying to relax and look natural while the camera lens clicked. "His project is the grand entry hall."

Someone shouted in the entryway. And was that the honking of geese she heard?

"What on earth?" Kaylee glanced at the partially open study door.

A goat dashed into the study with a clatter of hooves. It rounded the wingback chair, then scampered past the fireplace, bleating. To Kaylee's astonishment, it snatched the other end of the dove-gray ribbon she held and yanked it from her hand. The thief scampered from the room, trailing the ribbon in its wake.

"Oh no you don't!" Tossing the remaining spools onto the seat of the other wingback chair by the fireplace, Kaylee scrambled to grab the spool bouncing along on the floor. She missed. It bounded through the open doorway.

Mac took pictures as he followed the goat.

This was *not* good. The House of Christmas Trees was the Turtle Cove committee's first attempt to raise funds for student scholarships, and pandemonium had broken out right in front of a member of the press, who seemed intent on documenting it. Whoever was responsible for this—

Kaylee skidded to a stop in the grand entryway, which at the moment looked like a combination of Old MacDonald's farm and a Victorian mansion halfway decorated for Christmas.

Swans—Kaylee counted seven of them—flapped their wings as they hopped along the double-sided staircase that wound up to the second floor along the entryway's rear wall.

The goat and her ribbon disappeared in the direction of the dining room, where Barbara's shrieking could be heard.

"Good heavens, this is not a *farm*!" Barbara exclaimed.



All the while, Duncan stood grinning beside the magnificent eighteen-foot artificial blue spruce in the center of the entryway. He thought this was funny?

"What is going on?" Mary Bishop—Kaylee's friend, part-time Flower Patch employee, and fellow Petal Pusher—emerged from the parlor as a dove landed on her shoulder. "Kaylee?"

"I have no idea." Kaylee glanced at the immense front doors. Then she noticed a camera crew from KSEA News 10 had set up a tripod and camera facing the entryway tree and Duncan. *Great, just great.* They managed to get a Seattle TV crew to the island, and now *this*.

Muddy footprints covered the floor. Someone would have quite a job cleaning all this up.

"Please tell me you're not filming this," Mary said to the young man sporting a tie and holding a microphone.

"Uh no, ma'am." The television reporter's eyes twinkled.

"We need to catch them and get them into the backyard where it's at least enclosed." Kaylee pounded up the stairs. She waved at the swans. "Shoo, get down from there. Get!"

Barbara strode into the entryway. She propped her hands on her hips. "Who is responsible for this melee? Who is feeding ribbon to a goat? And where is Kristopher?"

"That would be me feeding the goat. Unintentionally, I might add," Kaylee called down from the stairs. "I don't know where Mr. Carroll is."

"Kris is going to be late," Meghan Benson, Mr. Carroll's assistant, chimed in. "I'm not sure when he'll arrive. Last night at the reception he told me he wasn't feeling well and I should get started here without him." Her blonde hair swished past her shoulders as she waved both hands at a goose on the other staircase opposite Kaylee.

Kaylee didn't miss the sounds of *The Twelve Days of Christmas*

that now boomed from an MP3 player's speakers resting on the coat-tree. She almost wanted to laugh, but for the swans who ignored her and decided that exploring the second-floor hallway off the staircase was more interesting than heading back downstairs.

It took a good ten minutes to round up the stampede that consisted of two doves, seven swans, six geese, three chickens, and the goat, which had managed to inhale half of the spool of Kaylee's ribbon before it darted outside.

Following it, Kaylee found a stack of cages that would hold the birds, and she let the others know about them.

All they needed was five rings and a pear tree. The goat could substitute for the partridge.

The goat now munched on wisps of dried grass in the backyard, which in summer was a kaleidoscope of color with its rose garden. Thankfully, roses weren't blooming now, although Kaylee mused that the hungry beast would probably snack on the thorn-covered branches. She'd heard somewhere that goats would devour entire rosebushes if given the chance.

When Kaylee arrived back in the entryway, she found Mary talking to the TV cameraman.

The young reporter looked sheepish as he folded his tripod. "I'm sorry. We had only about thirty minutes to shoot, and I just received another call I need to get to right away."

"We're the ones who are sorry." Kaylee glanced at Mary. "Is there any chance you might be able to come back another time? We'll be here working throughout the next two weeks."

The reporter shrugged. "I'm not sure. I'll try to put it on my schedule for Tuesday. But there's always the chance that something else might come up."

Kaylee knew her frown probably matched Mary's. "We understand."

Barbara tugged on the string of pearls around her neck, then

smoothed strands from her gray bob over one ear. "This is not acceptable, simply not acceptable."

No, it wasn't really acceptable, but what could they do? Kaylee picked up a shred of ribbon. It was almost as though someone was trying to sabotage the event before they even started. Today's news clip would have been free publicity well beyond Turtle Cove and Orcas Island. But who would want to come when it looked like the committee didn't have anything under control?

The doors closed behind the news team, and the reporter made his apologies as well, promising to come back when the proverbial dust had settled.

"If Kris had seen this ridiculousness, he would have been livid." Meghan shook her head. "I should call him, let him know to brace himself for this. And who knows? Maybe his show's production company could pull some strings to get exposure for the open house and auction. Although I imagine their advertising budget is already spent." She pulled her phone from her pocket and hit a button.

The muffled sound of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony came from inside a storage closet tucked beneath the stairs, its door camouflaged to look like paneling.

"What in the world? That's his ringtone for me." Meghan sprinted over to the hidden door and opened it, then looked down at the floor and screamed.

Kaylee moved to Meghan's side and gazed down at Kris, who was lying on his back. He was dressed in a festive red polo shirt with a white collar, which was embroidered with holly leaves and darker berries on its pocket. She noticed two small splotches of red on his worn jeans.

"Call for help," Kaylee said to Meghan. "I'll check his breathing. I know CPR."

The young woman appeared frozen in place, but she snapped to attention when Kaylee touched her arm.

As Kaylee knelt over the motionless form in front of her, she didn't see any rise or fall of his chest nor any movement of his white beard or mustache to indicate breathing. His wire-rimmed glasses were still in place. She found no pulse.

Kristopher Carroll was dead.



This was a crime scene. It had to be. There was no other explanation as to why Kris lay in the storage closet, and Kaylee doubted he would have closed that door to shut himself inside. It was possible that he'd closed himself inside the closet, then had a medical emergency and been unable to use his phone, but it wasn't likely. The closet was not a place anyone would choose to hang out in. On the other hand, designers did odd things for inspiration. Maybe hiding in closets had been Kris's odd thing.

Kaylee pushed away her racing thoughts and sprang to her feet. "We have to step back. Nobody touch anything. We need to call the police."

"What's going on?" Barbara stumbled toward the closet. "Kris? What is he doing in that closet? Why didn't he tell us he was here already? I don't understand."

Mary took Barbara gently by the elbow. "Let's go sit down. I don't think there's anything you can do for him right now." She led Barbara through a nearby set of open pocket doors into the parlor.

Meghan paced the entryway. "This can't be happening. No, no, no." She leaned against the opposite stairwell, which also had a closet, and sank onto the floor. Then she rested her head on her knees, breathing deeply.

The next few minutes were a chaotic blur as an ambulance and a couple of deputies from the sheriff's department arrived at the same time. Deputy Nick Durham immediately cleared the entryway and announced that no one was permitted to leave the

mansion until they were questioned. Except Barbara, who had collapsed. They sent for another ambulance to transport her to the Orcas Island Medical Center in Eastsound.

Everyone knew that Duncan was responsible for the animal circus. As soon as the police arrived, a van screeched to a halt in front of the mansion, and a man jumped out and retrieved the animals. In spite of the tragedy unfolding, it didn't escape anyone's notice when Duncan peeled some bills from his wallet and handed them to the animal handler, who muttered that he expected a tip. Few were amused by the prank.

Kris Carroll was pronounced dead at the scene, and the investigator took a series of photographs of the body and the closet and the surrounding area. Then the EMTs removed the body.

The designers anxiously waited in the parlor for their turn to be interviewed.

Nick stopped in the doorway, framed by pocket doors, and motioned to Kaylee.

She rose from the settee and joined him at the doors. "Deputy Durham."

"It's your turn." He led her into the very study she'd been prepared to decorate, which now served as the interview area.

Kaylee removed two spools of ribbon from the wingback chair before taking a seat across from Nick.

He got right to the point. "Obviously we have no confirmed cause of death yet, but I need your help in putting the pieces together."

"I understand. Whatever I can do to help, I will." Kaylee had nothing to worry about, but she still felt as if she was sitting in the principal's office.

"When was the last time you saw Mr. Carroll alive?" he asked.

She didn't have to think long about that. "It was at the reception last night. We—the designers—gathered for a meet

and greet with the scholarship committee and the owner of the mansion. Everyone wanted to talk to Kris because of his new design show. It was supposed to premiere in the spring. It was a big deal."

"I see." Nick scribbled some notes. "Did you notice anything unusual, any odd interactions between him and any of the other guests?"

"No I didn't."

"So you didn't see Mr. Carroll this morning?"

"No. Mr. Carroll's assistant, Meghan, told us that he wasn't feeling well and he'd be late this morning. He wanted us to start working without him."

Nick nodded. "Very good. Did you have any interaction with him prior to the reception?"

"No, not really. I saw him a few times this fall when he picked up flowers, mainly roses, at The Flower Patch. He asked about the shop, and I told him about my grandma and how I'd bought it from her recently. I didn't learn much about him personally." Kaylee remembered how Kris had been kind and engaging, with an excited twinkle in his blue eyes that had made her feel as if she was the most interesting person he'd ever spoken to. She had noticed this in all his conversations.

Another nod from Nick. "Well, you're free to go. If you remember anything else from last night, anything unusual or that might be important—"

"I'll be sure to let you know," she finished for him, then rose from the chair.

"If you could, please send in Meghan Benson." He studied the notebook in his hand.

Kaylee reentered the parlor where the others waited. Meghan and Mary sat on an upholstered fainting couch, murmuring to each other. At one of the parlor windows, Duncan stood texting,



his thumbs nimbly tapping on his phone. Kaylee approached Kris's assistant.

Meghan looked up. Her bloodshot, puffy eyes spoke volumes. "So it's my turn."

"Yes it is."

The young woman bit her lip, then fumbled with the crumpled tissue in her hands. "I've never had to talk to the police like this before. Am I in trouble?"

"No one's in trouble. At least not yet. Deputy Durham just wants to ask if you know anything about what might have happened to Mr. Carroll." Kaylee didn't want to say too much, but she believed that foul play was a strong possibility. Because Meghan had been Kris's assistant and had therefore spent more time with him than almost anyone, she would most likely be high on the list of suspects. Then again, any of them could be on that list, having been with Kris the night before he'd been found.

Meghan hesitated. Then she sucked in a deep breath and squared her shoulders. "I can do this."

"Yes you can," Kaylee said. "No one's been accused of anything."

*Yet.* The word hung unspoken in the air, as clearly as if she'd said it out loud.

Meghan nodded and strode from the room, the heels of her knee-high boots making determined clicks on the parquet floor.

Mary shook her head. "Unbelievable, just unbelievable."

"I know. Poor Kris." Kaylee dropped next to Mary on the couch. She let out a puff of breath. Then she thought of Sierra Underwood, the House of Christmas Trees committee chairwoman. Sierra was a loyal customer of The Flower Patch, and she had invited Kaylee to join the committee. The two had become fast friends since then. "Did anyone let Sierra know?"

"I've already called her," Mary answered. "The planning

committee is going to hold an emergency meeting on how to proceed with the open house."

Kaylee looked through the doorway at the muddied entryway tiles. Someone would need to clean up the muddy tracks the livestock and poultry had made all over the floors. "I don't think we'll be able to clean up the mess in that entryway anytime soon. No telling how long they'll be collecting evidence."

"No thanks to him," Mary hissed under her breath. She glared at Duncan, still entranced with his phone and lost in his own little world.

"I'm already trying to figure out how Kris could have ended up in that closet," Kaylee whispered.

"Yes, me too." Mary also lowered her voice. "The other Petals want to meet for coffee ASAP."

The Petal Pushers garden club shared a passion for all things floral and green, and it was one of the best parts of Kaylee's life in Turtle Cove. When Kaylee moved to the island amid the tumultuous changes in her professional life, they'd accepted her into their merry band as a replacement for their beloved Bea Lyons, Kaylee's grandmother. Their meetings contained discussions about life and love as well as actual gardening.

"I called Jess," Mary continued, "and she asked DeeDee to meet us at Death by Chocolate."

Jessica Roberts and DeeDee Wilcox were the other members of the Petal Pushers, and they couldn't resist a good mystery. Jessica owned the bakery and coffee shop where they often gathered.

"We can head over there as soon as you're done talking to Nick."

"You don't need to wait for me," Mary said. "Get a head start on that cup of coffee."

Before Kaylee could say anything else, Meghan strode back into the parlor.

"He's ready to see you now, Mary," she announced. Her eyes were overbright, but her voice was even. She removed her keys from her shoulder bag and darted from the parlor almost as quickly as she'd entered.

Mary stood, tugging at the hem of her coat, and turned to Kaylee. "I'll meet you at the bakery as soon as I'm done here."

"See you in a bit."

"Guess they're saving the best for last," Duncan quipped when it was just Kaylee and him in the parlor.

Kaylee didn't know how to respond, although she felt like saying a more appropriate description would be that they were saving the biggest ego for last. Now it was her turn to stand and gaze out one of the large-paned windows that gave a peek of the gray harbor beyond the neighboring rooftops.

"Look, the thing with the animals was a joke," Duncan said. "Plain and simple. I didn't plan for it to rain overnight, so that mess was completely unintentional. It's not like I was out to hurt anyone, especially Kris."

She looked at him sharply. "Who said anyone hurt Kris?"

Duncan shrugged. "Well, you got all Jessica Fletcher when Meghan opened the closet door, so it seems like you think foul play was involved."

"I don't know if it was or not, but of course the police need to find out how he wound up in that closet." Kaylee narrowed her eyes. "It's usually customary to investigate an unattended death if there's a chance it could be foul play. Since Deputy Durham is taking the time to question all of us himself, it looks like I'm not the only one wondering the same thing."

"Touché."

"So where were you last night after the reception?" Kaylee asked.

"Everything was already shut down here so I went to

Eastsound. I found a pub and stayed till closing. I'm going to tell the nice deputy that he can ask anyone." Duncan gave her an even look. "Where were *you* last night?"

"At home with my dog."

"No alibi. That doesn't bode well for you, does it?"

Kaylee tried not to roll her eyes.

Drops of rain began to patter on the windows, and they fit Kaylee's mood just fine. She needed that cup of coffee an hour ago. She would hear if the designers or committee members needed her help cleaning up the sorry mess at the mansion as soon as the police department cleared the premises.

Kaylee grabbed her purse and headed into the light rain.



Jessica had just handed a cup of coffee to a customer when Kaylee walked into Death by Chocolate.

"Kaylee, are you all right?" her friend asked, racing around the counter to hug her.

"Yes." Kaylee relaxed for the first time in hours, inhaling the aroma of freshly brewed coffee and ground beans. The rich smell of chocolate hung in the air too, along with the buttery scent of pastries. Her stomach growled. She'd been in a hurry to get out the door this morning and hadn't grabbed anything to eat.

Jessica made for the pot behind the counter. "Here. This one's on the house. And I'm adding an extra shot of espresso," she said, pouring a cup of coffee and sliding it across the antique wooden counter. "I couldn't believe it when Mary told me about Mr. Carroll."

Kaylee nodded. "I'm still in shock." She couldn't get the image of Kris lying there on the closet floor out of her head.

"I should have known there was a tragedy. Oliver has been droopy and pensive since yesterday." Jessica pointed at a potted lavender geranium on the counter, which she'd dubbed Oliver. She interpreted any sudden droopiness or loss of petals as a harbinger of bad things to come for someone in Turtle Cove.

Despite the terrible situation, Kaylee hid a smile as she lifted the cup and took a sip. "Mary will be here soon."

"DeeDee is on her way too." Jessica bit her lip. "This is awful, just awful. Poor Mr. Carroll, passing away so close to Christmas."

A few minutes later the lone customer left the shop just as Mary and DeeDee entered together.

Mary shook the rain off her umbrella before tucking it into the stand by the door. "Kris Carroll was so young. Only fifty-five. *Fifty-five*. It's hard to believe."

Jessica fetched cups of coffee for the newcomers, and the four women settled around the table closest to the counter.

"So what do you think happened to Mr. Carroll? A medical emergency?" DeeDee asked.

"Maybe. I wonder if he had any medical issues," Kaylee said. "Meghan, his assistant, would know."

"Who do you think was the last person to talk to him?" Mary said.

"I bet it was Barbara," Jessica said, eyes bright. "For the last few months she was either with Kris or talking about him every time she stopped in here. Was she at the mansion this morning?"

"Yes, she was in the dining room, working on her design," Mary replied.

"I'm glad she wasn't the one who opened the closet door," Kaylee said. "It was awful."

Besides seeing Kris lying there in the closet, Barbara's sobs had been the saddest thing this morning. The recollection brought a lump to Kaylee's throat, making her think of how her

grandmother must have felt when she'd learned of her husband's passing. She pushed those thoughts aside, forcing herself to focus on her grandmother's current happiness with her sister.

"Maybe it was just an accident," DeeDee suggested. "Perhaps he hit his head on something in the closet and knocked himself out."

"That wouldn't have killed him, though," Jessica pointed out.

"I don't know," Kaylee said. "I didn't notice any evident injuries. I saw a couple of red splotches on his jeans, but I'm not positive it was blood."

"Maybe somebody moved his body from somewhere else and stuck it in the closet," Jessica offered.

Mary shuddered. "Oh my."

"That's a possibility. I mean, where would you hide a body on Orcas Island anyway?" Kaylee wondered aloud. "But why in the mansion?"

Jessica took a sip of her coffee, then set the cup down. "I'm concerned with *who* could have wanted to hurt him. He's a popular man, and everyone's been talking about his new show. It's going to be an instant hit. Or it would have been an instant hit."

Kaylee noticed worry lines on Mary's forehead. "What is it?"

"Well, I saw something odd at the reception last night. It might be nothing." Mary bit her lower lip. "I've been thinking about it ever since I heard the news."

"Come on." DeeDee nudged Mary's elbow. "Spit it out."

"While everyone was mixing and mingling, I saw Kris over in a corner, talking to Sierra Underwood, who chairs the committee. It didn't look like a good conversation either."

"How so?" Kaylee asked.

"Neither of them appeared happy. In fact, Kris looked angry—his cheeks were red—and when Sierra tried to walk away from him, he grabbed her arm and she pulled away." Mary

frowned. "It didn't look like he grabbed her arm very hard, but still . . ."

Silence hung between the four of them for a few moments.

DeeDee broke the silence. "Just because they had a disagreement or a heated conversation doesn't mean one of them wanted to hurt the other."

"That's true enough," Kaylee agreed. Maybe it had a perfectly simple explanation, like DeeDee suggested.

"The House of Christmas Trees committee will be meeting soon. One of us should take Sierra aside and see what she says about it." Mary turned to Kaylee. "You seem a bit closer to her than the rest of us. How about you talk to her?"

"Sure. But I don't know if what she has to say will have any bearing on what happened to Kris."

*At least, I hope it doesn't.*