

Planted Evidence





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1



The Flower Patch glowed in the October sunlight, and Kaylee Bleu smiled in appreciation as she scanned the front of her flower shop, a repurposed Victorian mansion that was always stunning. Temperatures wouldn't drop to freezing for another few weeks, so the flowers on her wraparound porch still thrived. As she gazed down Main Street, she noticed more flowers blooming in profusion—in boxes, in wooden tubs along the curbs, and in baskets hanging from the light posts.

Kaylee had purchased the flower shop—along with her home, Wildflower Cottage—from her grandmother, and every day she felt grateful for her life on Orcas Island.

Bear, her adorable dachshund, licked her hand.

She rubbed his silky ears and straightened his orange-and-yellow striped bow tie before climbing the steps to the porch and unlocking the front door.

Inside The Flower Patch, Kaylee fluffed the pillows in the seating area where she held consultations and rearranged displays of handcrafted lavender goat milk soaps and rosewater body lotion. Then she cleaned the glass fronts of the refrigerated coolers where she stored cut flowers and finished arrangements.

Bear nudged her leg and gave a single bark. It was his signal that he was ready for his treat from the stash she kept in her office filing cabinet.

Kaylee smiled as she headed upstairs. "Good thing I have you to keep me grounded in what's important."

Bear trotted up the stairs behind her.

In her office, she checked her messages and e-mails, but she

didn't have any that demanded immediate attention. It was a blessing to ease into her workday before customers' demands took over.

However, Bear's dog biscuit needs were constant. The reddish-brown dachshund repeatedly nudged the file cabinet drawer with his nose.

"Don't hurt yourself. Here." Kaylee gave him a biscuit.

Bear carried it to his doggy bed in the corner. Curling up, he settled in to enjoy his treat.

Downstairs, Kaylee grabbed a broom and flipped the sign on the front door from *Closed* to *Open*. She gathered her dark-brown hair into a ponytail, then went outside and began sweeping the wide veranda that curved around two sides of The Flower Patch. Located on a corner on Main Street, her shop faced The Chandlery Gift Shop, a boutique that sold cards, stationery, candles, and postcards. Other shops, filled with local artisan crafts and a variety of specialized products, lined the quaint streets of Turtle Cove, Washington.

Kaylee leaned on her broom and gazed down the quiet street. Tourist crowds had thinned ever since children had returned to school. She picked a few wrinkled blossoms from her pots and hanging baskets of red *Impatiens walleriana*, then continued sweeping. Moving around to the side porch, she grabbed her watering can.

Without warning, a sheriff's car sped past her shop and pulled up outside The Velvet Box jewelry store. Sheriff Eddie Maddox and Deputy Nick Durham exited the car and strode inside.

What was going on over there that required the police? Was there a robbery in progress? Had they arrived without sirens so that a criminal wouldn't panic and shoot someone? Kaylee's friend Amanda Denman, who'd recently moved to town with her fifteen-year-old daughter, Madison, worked there. Had Amanda or anyone else already been hurt?

Kaylee dropped her watering can and whispered a prayer as she sprinted toward the store.

Two shoppers on the sidewalk stopped and stared as Kaylee raced by.

Heart pounding, she peered through the plate glass window that covered most of the jewelry store's otherwise-brick front. She noticed that the law officers had not drawn their guns, and she didn't see anyone who appeared to be a criminal. Sheriff Maddox was speaking to the store's owner, Joseph Liddon. Amanda stood at her employer's elbow.

Kaylee's gaze was riveted on Amanda's horrified expression. Were they bringing her bad news? Had Amanda's daughter been injured at school?

Kaylee pushed through the cluster of gawkers gathered on the sidewalk and burst inside. "Amanda, is everything all right? Is it Madison?" She hurried to her friend's side and slid an arm around her.

Amanda trembled, and her eyes had a wild look.

"Kaylee, could you wait outside?" Sheriff Maddox asked. Although in the past the sheriff had accepted Kaylee's help in her field of forensic botany, he obviously didn't find her presence necessary at the moment. "Mrs. Denman is fine."

"She's obviously *not* fine." Kaylee spoke evenly, trying to match his calm tone of voice. "What happened?"

Amanda's mouth trembled. "They think—"

"Please," Joseph Liddon interrupted. "This does not concern you."

Kaylee studied the store owner. His frosty smile chilled her. She'd never noticed before, but his protruding eyes reminded her of an aging frog, and the green shirt he wore today only made the resemblance more pronounced. She almost expected his tongue to dart out and catch a fly.

"They've accused me of theft," Amanda blurted out, flushed and breathless.

“What? That’s ridiculous!” Kaylee zeroed in on Deputy Nick Durham, a friend of hers. “You can’t be serious. Amanda would never steal anything.”

Nick scratched his trimmed goatee and darted a glance at his boss.

The sheriff’s expression was impossible to read. He cleared his throat, the deep rumble a clear order for his deputy not to say a word. “Step aside.” He motioned Kaylee to stand by the front door. “If you interrupt again, you’ll need to leave.”

Amanda gave Kaylee such a pleading look that Kaylee bit back her protest. Fuming, she moved near the door.

A young couple by a display of engagement rings gaped at the proceedings, as if they were witnessing a reality TV show. The woman whipped out her phone to take pictures or a video, and Kaylee scowled at her. She quickly put the phone away.

“Now, Mrs. Denman,” the sheriff said, “pick up where you left off before we were interrupted.”

Amanda glanced at Kaylee, gulped, and turned back to the sheriff. “I helped close the store last night, the same as always.”

“Not *exactly* the same,” Joseph cut in.

Sheriff Maddox skewered him with a black look. “You’ll get your chance in a minute.”

Joseph’s bulging eyes seemed to protrude even more, and he rocked on the balls of his feet. But he fell silent.

Amanda took a deep breath. “As far as I remember, I closed the store with Mr. Liddon the same as always. He locked the front door at six, we both covered the less expensive jewelry with flannel cloths, and we carried the most expensive pieces to the safe to lock up for the night.”

“And the safe is located where?” The sheriff shook his pen and then wrote in his small spiral notebook.

“In Mr. Liddon’s office.”

Maddox glanced up from his notebook. "Were you ever alone in the office?"

"I don't believe so." She turned to Joseph. "Was I?"

"No she wasn't," he admitted.

"Then what was different about last night?" Nick asked.

"I'll tell you what was different," Joseph said. "I was in the office the whole time, but while Mrs. Denman finished placing necklaces in the safe, I sat at my desk to finish some bookwork. The safe is located directly behind my desk, so I didn't actually *see* her put the remaining jewelry in there." He shot her an accusing look. "That must have been when she, uh, pocketed the necklaces. It would have been an easy thing to do."

"But I didn't!" The desperate note in Amanda's voice made Kaylee wince.

Sheriff Maddox glanced from Amanda to Joseph. "Who locked the safe last night then?"

"Mr. Liddon always does," Amanda said. "But last night—for the first time—he continued working on the ledgers and told me to give the dial a twirl when I was done. So I did."

"Or did you barely close the safe door so you could open it again later?" Joseph retorted.

Kaylee clenched her fists, wishing she could box Joseph's ears.

"No, I twirled the dial," Amanda insisted. "Then I got my coat and left by the back door because I'd parked in the alley."

The sheriff nodded at the store owner. "What about when you opened the safe this morning?"

Joseph frowned. "The safe *was* locked when I came to work." Then he brightened. "She must have slipped the jewelry into her pocket *before* locking the safe. I was concentrating on the books and didn't notice. Now I know why she left the instant she closed the safe."

"I always leave right away," Amanda stated. "And last night

my daughter was waiting on me at the ferry after a trip for school, so I had to hurry over to pick her up.”

Sheriff Maddox ran a hand through his black hair, which was peppered with gray. “Mr. Liddon, are you positive the missing pieces of jewelry were here last night when you locked up?”

“I’m positive. I’d taken out two whole trays of our most expensive items to display for Mrs. Margaret Fox. She tried on half a dozen pieces before buying a matching ruby ring and necklace. When she left at six, the other pieces were still on top of the glass case.” Joseph puffed out his chest. “And before you ask, no other customers were in the store after Mrs. Fox left.”

“I see.” The sheriff jotted down another note. “Do you agree with your employer’s account of the customers, Mrs. Denman?”

Amanda nodded. She seemed to be almost in a daze.

Kaylee cringed at Amanda’s silent admission. Maybe she read too many mysteries, but she wished Amanda had refrained from answering questions and asked for a lawyer instead. Kaylee was troubled at how her friend had seemed to shrink a bit with each question, as if she were already defeated.

The sheriff slipped his notebook into his pocket. “It appears that you had both the means and the opportunity to steal the jewelry.”

Kaylee dug her fingernails into her palms. Means and opportunity? She couldn’t argue with that, but surely something was missing. Sheriff Maddox hadn’t mentioned a motive.

Her heart sank. If the authorities dug into Amanda’s bank accounts, they’d soon discover that her debt load provided her with ample motive.

Kaylee couldn’t stand it anymore. “This is all circumstantial. You have no proof at all.”

Joseph jabbed a finger at her. “Since you’re the one who recommended that I hire her, your opinion is worth exactly nothing.”

The sheriff silenced them both with an icy stare. “I was

getting to the need for proof before filing any charges. I'll obtain a search warrant for Mrs. Denman's home." He faced Amanda. "I want you to stay here in the store until we have a chance to search your house."

"I don't have the missing jewelry." Amanda was near tears. "I have nothing to hide. You don't need a warrant. I'll let you in right now, and you can search all you like. You won't find anything."

Alarms went off in Kaylee's head. That sounded dangerous. She had no doubt that Amanda was telling the truth, but shouldn't she have a lawyer present for her own protection?

When Amanda was led to the sheriff's car, Kaylee touched her arm. "I'll be right behind you." She ran back to the flower shop, grabbed her purse and locked the shop, then sped across town to Amanda's rented cottage.

The sheriff and deputy were already out of their car.

"You stay in the car," Sheriff Maddox instructed Amanda.

Kaylee followed them to the back door, where Nick stopped her. "You can't come in, but you can wait in the patrol car with your friend if you want."

Kaylee gestured to the back door. "Look. Her lock's broken."

"So it is. But there's no telling when that happened."

Kaylee leaned closer. Was it possible that the sheriff had just done it? But no, why would he? Amanda would have given him her house keys. Kaylee joined Amanda in the back seat of the squad car. Squeezing Amanda's hand, Kaylee sat beside her in silence and waited.

They didn't have to wait long.

Sheriff Maddox stepped outside the back door, something sparkly dangling from his hand.

"Oh no," Amanda whispered.

The sheriff motioned for them both to get out of the car. "We found this emerald necklace in your tea canister."

"That's impossible." Amanda bit down on her quivering lower lip.

"Of course it is." Kaylee put her hands on her hips. "Surely you can see it was planted on Amanda. Otherwise she never would have invited you to search her house without a warrant."

Sheriff Maddox slipped the jewelry into an evidence bag. "Unless her cooperation was designed to make her appear innocent."

Kaylee fought to keep her expression respectful when she wanted to roll her eyes instead. "If Amanda had stolen it, do you really think she couldn't have found a better hiding place than a tea canister?" She pointed at the back entry. "Did Nick show you the door? The lock's broken. It's obvious to me that someone broke in and planted the necklace where you couldn't possibly miss it."

"Or she broke the lock herself to make it look like there had been an intruder," Sheriff Maddox replied. "Either way, it's secured now."

Kaylee bit her tongue. It wouldn't do any good to get into an argument with the sheriff. It would most likely make things even worse for Amanda. She waited helplessly while Amanda got into the back of the sheriff's car. She sat, hunched over, as if trying to make herself too small to be noticed.

After watching them disappear down the street, Kaylee noticed the pain in her chest and realized she'd been holding her breath. She inhaled some deep breaths, then climbed into her SUV and headed back to The Flower Patch.



Three days later, Kaylee was still stunned at what had happened to Amanda. Although the morning was clear and crisp,

menacing clouds lurked on the horizon of her mind. While fall color on Orcas Island would peak soon, her personal world felt gray. Sighing, Kaylee trudged up the front steps to The Flower Patch, stooped to retrieve *The Orcas Gazette* on the porch, and unlocked the door.

Bear, dressed in a black bow tie featuring tiny pumpkins, nearly tripped her by wrapping his leash around her ankles and dashing inside.

She dropped his leash as the headline on the front page leaped out at her: *Local Woman Arrested in Jewelry Theft*. The story filled three columns, and under the headline was Amanda's photo, her brow furrowed over frightened eyes. Kaylee barely recognized her friend's face.

She read the article. Although the newspaper got the facts straight, Kaylee knew that the implication was 100 percent wrong.

The sheriff's department arrested Amanda Denman at her home in Turtle Cove for the theft of several necklaces and rings from The Velvet Box jewelry store, where she has been employed as a clerk for one month. Although Mrs. Denman denied taking the jewelry, a search of her home turned up the missing emerald necklace. Two diamond necklaces and three diamond rings, with a combined estimated value of \$18,000, are still missing. The Velvet Box owner, Joseph Liddon, has offered a substantial reward for the return of all the jewelry.

Inside the shop, she pocketed her keys and tossed the weekly newspaper on the counter, feeling sick over this happening to her friend. She shook her head as she hung up her down-filled jacket and flipped on the lights on the first floor. Although it dispelled

the interior shadows of the shop, it didn't shift the gloom that settled over her like a wool blanket. Mentally giving herself a good shake, she unclipped Bear's leash and hung it on a hook.

"Come on," she said to him. "I can't fix Amanda's situation today, but I can tackle our work and get you a treat."

Bear's ears perked up at his favorite word, and he barked enthusiastic agreement.

If only I could solve Amanda's problem so easily.



Later Bear followed Kaylee out to the wraparound porch. Using the cloth tucked into her back pocket, she dusted the white wooden rockers and wicker tables grouped on the porch. After that, she watered the pots of red *Impatiens walleriana* (or "busy Lizzies" as Grandma always called them). She was so used to her routine that she didn't have to think, and as she moved from planter to planter, her gaze was continually drawn to the jewelry store across the street. Kaylee studied the scene of the crime, wishing she could come up with a plan to exonerate her friend.

Would she ever be able to look at The Velvet Box again without picturing Amanda being led to the police car parked out front in full view of every customer in the store and pedestrian on the sidewalk?

Now she regretted convincing Amanda to move to Turtle Cove. According to Amanda, Kaylee had sounded like Turtle Cove's Chamber of Commerce as she'd gushed about Orcas Island's stunning ocean shorelines, emerald-green forests, sparkling lakes, spectacular wildlife, and scenic vineyards. Kaylee admitted she was biased. She'd been in love with the island since she was a child visiting her grandparents.

Over Labor Day weekend, Amanda had arrived with her daughter, Madison. Amanda's determined smile hadn't quite touched her eyes. Her husband of twenty years had left her high and dry, his heavy debts wiping both of them out financially. Kaylee had urged her to come to Turtle Cove to make a fresh start and recuperate, hoping the soothing salty breezes and the warmth of the small town's residents would work its healing magic on Amanda's heart.

Kaylee's plan had gone swimmingly at first, and she'd even helped her friend get a sales job at The Velvet Box. Amanda had enjoyed helping customers buy engagement rings and anniversary gifts, and over the past weeks, the island environment had put color in her cheeks and a tiny spring in her step.

Until the robbery.

Although the newspaper article said that the police investigation was continuing, Kaylee had her doubts. If they were still investigating, why had they arrested Amanda already? She thought Sheriff Maddox seemed prematurely satisfied that he'd found the right person.

"Hi, Kaylee! Beautiful morning, isn't it?"

Kaylee whirled around as she was jerked out of her anxious thoughts. Heart pounding like a jackhammer, she picked up the broom and watering can. She smiled and waved at the widowed sisters across the street who were opening up The Chandlery Gift Shop.

Penelope Cole and Sylvia Rosenthal were both in their sixties and still had a trace of a Georgian accent, but that was where their similarities ended. Penelope's full figure was a testament to her love of pie baking, and her sweet disposition attracted people of all ages. She often brought her calico cat, Peaches, with her to the store. Her younger sister, Sylvia, was on the slender side and wore her white hair in a short bob, and she was just as

organized as Penelope was flaky. Sylvia was not fond of cats, but she tolerated her sister's.

The sisters had taken Amanda and Madison under their wings, even letting Madison stay with them while Amanda was in jail. Kaylee suspected that Penelope would have gladly adopted them both.

Back inside The Flower Patch, Bear climbed the stairs, and Kaylee guessed he was ready for a nap. She put the broom away, slamming the closet door twice before it would stay closed. All the doors were swollen after the unusually large amount of rain they'd received so far this month.

Out front, the bell over the shop door chimed.

Kaylee glanced at her watch. Amanda, out on bail, had planned to drop in this morning. Kaylee snatched the morning newspaper from where she'd left it on the counter and buried it in the bottom of the wastebasket.

She wished she could make her friend's troubles disappear that quickly.

2



Kaylee pasted on a cheery smile and hurried to the front door. “Oh!” She stopped abruptly. “It’s you.”

“Not sure how I should take that.” Reese Holt grinned, making his blue eyes crinkle at the corners. “You were obviously expecting someone else.”

Despite the chilly weather, Reese was dressed in worn jeans and a T-shirt, with a flannel shirt open over it. He was a master carpenter and a good friend, but Kaylee secretly admitted that his rugged good looks and disarming smile also contributed to her admiration of him.

Kaylee laughed. “I *was* expecting someone else, but you’re a welcome surprise.”

“Just thought I’d drop in and give you the news in person,” Reese said. “Amanda’s landlord called me about her back door lock. I just fixed it.”

“Oh, good. Did you take a photo of the broken lock first?”

“I thought you might want one.” He pulled his phone from his back pocket, found the photo, and showed it to her. “Do you want me to send it to you?”

“Yes. I’ll forward it to Amanda’s lawyer.”

Reese pushed a few buttons, then stuck his phone into his pocket. “I’m not sure it will do her any good,” he warned.

“Why not? It’s a clear shot.” Kaylee glanced outside as the sun passed under a cloud.

“The photo’s clear, but it’s impossible to tell how recently the lock was damaged. If I were pushed for an answer, I’d say it was probably broken within the last two weeks, but I can’t say

any closer than that.”

Kaylee’s shoulders drooped. His news didn’t help at all. “So the lock could have been broken even before the theft?”

“The wood around the lock splintered a bit, and the exposed wood underneath hasn’t weathered, which suggests a recent break,” Reese explained. “But it’s in a protected spot under her covered porch, so it wouldn’t weather nearly as fast as something exposed to the elements.”

Almost as if on cue, a faint rumble to the west reminded Kaylee of the day’s forecast. More rain. The humidity and dark days could dampen one’s spirits even more than it dampened the ground.

“It sure is quiet in here,” Reese remarked.

“It’s just me and Bear at the moment. He’s napping.” She called up the stairs to him.

In seconds the dog flew down the stairs, barking a greeting. Bear raced over to Reese and sniffed his work boots, then lifted his head.

Reese bent down to scratch Bear’s ears and straightened his bow tie, which had been knocked crooked by his nap. “Where’s Mary?”

Mary Bishop, Kaylee’s right hand at The Flower Patch, worked part-time as her floral designer. She knew the meaning of every flower and enjoyed helping people design arrangements that were both beautiful and meaningful. At sixty, she was fit, friendly, and full of energy, a definite asset to the shop.

“She’s out of town for a couple of weeks.”

“I’m surprised Mary would leave just before the fall festival.”

Kaylee smiled at her dog, who trotted back and forth between her and Reese, enjoying the affection he got from both. “It’s unusual, yes, but she felt it was important. Mary’s college roommate is entering her second marriage after being widowed for

many years. Mary's helping her sort out her household so she can move across the country."

"What are the rest of the Petals planning to do at the fall festival?" he asked.

Kaylee and Mary were members of the Petal Pushers garden club, and the group had chosen a charity to work with. "We're raising money for Island Grove, that educational park on the other side of the island."

"That's a great place, and I'm sure they'll appreciate the donation. Are you handling everything all right by yourself?"

"I hired some temporary help. Mary's husband met a man at the library while attending a meeting of his amateur whale watching club."

"Is he a forensic botanist too?" Reese asked, a teasing note in his voice.

Kaylee rolled her eyes. "No, but he can repot plants for the fall festival sale, do some cleaning, and make deliveries."

"And that's enough help?"

"Well, he's not Mary," Kaylee admitted, "but he's been very helpful." She caught movement on the front porch. "Here he is now."

The bell over the door chimed, and Bear barked a greeting.

A man nearing seventy stepped inside. In his neat blue sweater and narrow tie, he was the definition of dapper.

"Good morning, Andrew." Kaylee grinned and waved him closer. "I'd like you to meet our town's master carpenter and handiest handyman, Reese Holt. Reese, this is Andrew Whitaker."

"Glad to meet you." Andrew stuck out his hand. It was thin and covered with leathery, brown skin like the rest of him, including the top of his tanned, nearly bald pate.

Reese shook his hand. "Same here."

Andrew removed his sweater and hung it up, rolled up his shirtsleeves, and smiled at Kaylee. "Where shall I begin today?"

Kaylee handed him a small list on a lavender sticky note shaped like a tulip. "First, start these two arrangements. For one arrangement, let's use *Platycodon grandiflorus*. That's the bluish-purple balloon flower. For the second one, make sure you have room for both the white and blue *Campanula persicifolia*."

Andrew nodded. "The peach-leaved bellflower, right?"

"Exactly. Can you deliver them when they're done?"

"No problem." Andrew headed upstairs to the workroom.

The light from outside dimmed a bit more, and thunder rumbled in the distance. Kaylee saw her hanging baskets of impatiens sway and twist in the wind.

As she hurried to take them down, she asked Reece again, "You're absolutely sure you can't pinpoint when the lock was broken? Surely someone broke in and planted that necklace."

Reese gave her a sheepish expression. "There's one other possibility."

"Like what?"

"I hate to even mention it, but you've told me your friend was short of money."

Kaylee was shocked. "Yes, but Amanda would never steal." How could Reese think what everyone else suspected? And how could he so thoroughly mistrust her judgment?

"What about her daughter?" he asked. "Isn't she in high school?"

"Madison is no more a thief than her mother is," Kaylee said coldly.

"Could the daughter have persuaded a boyfriend to steal it for her? Then he could have delivered it to the house, forced the lock, and hid it in the first place he found before running off."

"No, that's impossible. Madison doesn't even have a boyfriend. Amanda would have told me if she did."

"Parents don't always know," Reese stated.

“True,” Kaylee admitted reluctantly. “And Madison is certainly aware of their financial problems.”

Just then lightning flashed, thunder boomed, the heavens opened, and rain fell in torrents.

Bear growled deep in his throat.

While Kaylee stroked her trembling dog, she debated Reese’s idea, and doubt began to creep in. What if he was right?

If Madison *had* stolen the jewelry—with or without help from a friend—nothing would comfort Amanda, even if she were found innocent herself.



Kaylee was glad to see Madison show up that day after school. She bore a remarkable resemblance to Amanda, except that her blonde, wavy hair sported a short, layered cut.

Every science student had to do something at the high school bazaar to help raise money for new lab equipment, and Madison and her lab partner, Chloe Padgett, planned to sell carnivorous plants such as Venus flytraps, cobra lilies, and sundew plants. They had asked to use the workroom at the flower shop to repot the plants she and Chloe had grown in the biology class’s greenhouse. Madison and Kaylee would transfer the seedlings from their trays into individual disposable cups this afternoon.

Madison was positive that kids would buy every plant they had. Kaylee agreed. She herself had always been fascinated with plants that could trap and digest insects.

Kaylee enjoyed Madison’s quirky sense of humor, but today, Madison wore a glum expression.

“Mom’s at her lawyer’s.” Madison slumped at the worktable

where the small plants waited alongside a bucket of Kaylee's custom-mixed potting soil—half sand and half peat moss. "Your lawyer will get Mom off, won't he?" Her lower lip trembled, and she bit down on it. "He's really good, right?"

"Yes, Mr. LeMasters is very good, but even a lousy lawyer could get your mother off because she's innocent." Kaylee paused, wanting to cheer Madison up. Maybe the kindest thing to do was to get her mind off her mother—at least for a little while. "What are other kids doing to raise money at the bazaar?"

"Lots of stuff." Madison took a deep breath and straightened. "There's going to be a white elephant auction and a used book sale. Someone's having a photo booth." She shrugged. "There are a few guessing games. You know, like the ones where you guess how many jelly beans or seashells are in a huge jar to get a prize . . ." Her voice trailed off.

Kaylee filled half a dozen of the disposable cups with the loose soil and reached for the tray of cobra lilies. "Some kids from your class were in this week collecting things for a recycling project. They wanted old ink cartridges and flip phones to take to a recycling facility to exchange for cash."

"I think our meat-eating plants are the most unusual idea," Madison said, "but the student art booth will probably make more money."

"Students are selling their art?"

"Yeah. They got their original art printed on mugs and T-shirts. They think they'll sell more that way since the holidays are coming up. The car wash in the parking lot during the bazaar will probably make a lot of cash too."

Kaylee nodded. "It's handy. People can get their cars cleaned while they're inside shopping."

The conversation died off, and Kaylee cast about for other topics of interest to a teenager. Hopefully Andrew would be back

soon from his deliveries. To Kaylee's surprise, he and Madison had hit it off earlier.

Kaylee watched Madison out of the corner of her eye as she absentmindedly touched the trigger hair on the edge of a hinged flytrap. It snapped shut, but it would open again in twenty-four hours because there was no food in the trap.

"Oh!" Kaylee said, startling Madison out of her reverie. "I almost forgot. The brochures about the care and feeding of carnivorous plants are done and ready to be proofread and printed. Do you want to go over them with me?"

"Sure." Madison's eyes brightened. "Thanks for designing them."

Kaylee jogged to her office and smiled at Bear curled up in his dog bed for his afternoon siesta. Nothing moved but the gentle rise and fall of his stomach. She grabbed the two designs she'd created. The one on basic care was primarily photos, and the second layout gave more detailed scientific information.

Back in the workroom, Kaylee cleaned spilled potting soil from one end of the worktable and spread out the two brochures side by side. The first one featured large colorful photos of several types of meat-eating plants. Each plant came with a fun fact in a balloon shape. *Venus flytrap jaws snap shut in a tenth of a second. Pitcher plants, also known as cobra lilies, attract insects with a sweet substance in their pitchers. Sundew plants catch insects by wrapping their tentacles around them.*

"What do you think?" Kaylee asked.

Madison held the first brochure up to the light. "This one's good. It's fun, but it also gives enough information at the bottom on how to care for the plants."

"You don't want them to die after buyers take them home."

"Isn't it weird that these plants only grow in poor soil?"

"You just have to match the soil to what they would naturally

grow in. Long ago carnivorous plants adapted to nutrient-poor soils that were full of peat and sand,” Kaylee explained.

Madison gestured to the bucket of potting soil. “What did you put in it?”

“I used sphagnum peat moss and horticultural sand. The minerals and fertilizer in regular potting soil would kill these little meat eaters.” She pointed to the second brochure on the table. “This one is my favorite layout.”

Madison picked up the brochure and scanned the blocks of content, then gave Kaylee her first genuine smile of the afternoon. “‘*Darlingtonia californica*’?”

“That’s your cobra lily.” Kaylee’s PhD in plant taxonomy had made creating the second brochure enjoyable. It had reminded her of her years as an instructor at the University of Washington in Seattle. “Surely the serious science student wants to know more than a few fun facts. The Venus flytrap is *Dionaea muscipula*. Your sundew plants are the genus *Drosera*, but there are nearly 200 species within that genus. And—”

“Little kids won’t read all that,” Madison interrupted. “I think it’s the elementary and middle school kids who will snap the plants up.” She touched a flytrap and made it snap shut. “No pun intended.”

Kaylee tried to hide her disappointment. “You don’t think they’d want to know more about the botany?”

“Sure, but I think this will be over their heads.” Madison read aloud, “‘The sundew glands exude nectar, adhesive compounds, and digestive enzymes.’ Or this: ‘The list of plants described as near carnivorous, protocarnivorous, or borderline carnivorous is quite diverse.’”

“Point taken.”

Madison set the brochures down. “Why don’t we print seventy-five of the first brochure and maybe twenty of the second one?”

Kaylee tilted her head and studied both layouts. "What if I also add some websites on the bottom of the first brochure so a serious-minded younger student can learn more about the science if he or she wants to?"

The bell over the front door chimed.

A few moments later Andrew appeared in the workroom doorway and waved at Madison, then said to Kaylee, "The rain stopped, and now the sun is out. All the plants have been delivered, and here's the paperwork." He handed over the receipts.

"That's great," Kaylee said as she accepted them. "Thank you."

Andrew turned to Madison. "How's the repotting going?"

Madison beamed and launched into a detailed explanation.

Kaylee smiled, remembering her own times with her grandparents and the wonderful memories they'd shared. Since Madison had no grandparents nearby, Andrew's presence in the shop was an added bonus.

Andrew cleared his throat. "I want to say how sorry I am about your mother. I'm sure this confusion will be cleared up soon."

"Thanks." Madison's voice was almost too soft to hear.

Kaylee hoped Andrew was right, but she wasn't as optimistic. Normally she had confidence in the sheriff's department, but in this case, it didn't seem wise. Not if she wanted to keep Amanda from going to prison.