

A Cultivated Crime

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A Cultivated Crime



Grace Marcello

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1



“When a woman is murdered, they should always look at the husband first,” DeeDee Wilcox declared.

Kaylee Bleu shook her head. She had to hand it to DeeDee to sound like such an expert on the morbid subject.

“Even if he’s tied up and unconscious in the basement?” Jessica Roberts asked doubtfully.

“Especially then.” DeeDee leaned forward, shoving aside her half-eaten chocolate croissant. The topic was apparently compelling enough to make her forget about one of her favorite pastimes—eating anything chocolate—which they were all doing this morning at Jessica’s decadent bakery and coffee shop, *Death by Chocolate*.

DeeDee ran *Between the Lines*, a mystery bookstore, and therefore had ample opportunity to read about murders of all kinds, often before the rest of them. This morning she was filling them in on her latest read.

“The book paints the guy as a saint. But what kind of man lets his wife and two daughters get kidnapped while he sits on a couch with his hands allegedly tied? I mean, come on. That’s a huge red flag.” DeeDee turned to Kaylee. “Can you imagine Reese doing anything like that? He’d fight to the death to protect someone he loves.”

Kaylee felt her face redden. Naturally, DeeDee had to use Reese Holt as the best example of a courageous man. A master carpenter who ran his own business, Reese was the whole package—kind, strong, handsome, and handy. He was the most sought-after handyman in Turtle Cove, Washington, and he received a good

deal of attention from the women in town.

Kaylee couldn't argue with DeeDee's logic, but her friend was being blatantly obvious about the fact that she wanted Kaylee to fall into Reese's arms.

Since Kaylee had moved to the area, she'd gotten to know Reese. He was always on hand to help her with any repairs or improvements, whether at The Flower Patch or Wildflower Cottage, where she and her dachshund, Bear, lived. She'd bought the shop and the cottage from her grandmother a few years ago, and Reese had always helped her grandmother too. Kaylee and Reese were just friends—nothing more.

"He does seem like the type to put up a fight," Kaylee said lamely.

"Oh, I think he'd do more than put up a fight," Mary Bishop, the fourth member of their group, said with a mischievous smile. "Especially if it was Kaylee."

"I don't need some guy to save me," Kaylee argued. "Can we get back to the oh-so-cheery topics of home invasions and kidnapping? Or better yet, gardening?"

After all, that was their purpose. The four women belonged to the Petal Pushers garden club. Theoretically, they talked about gardening. Realistically, they chatted about gardening and any other interesting—or creepy—topic that struck their fancy.

The Petals loved mysteries, and they would never pass up a chance to dissect a real-life one. It was an activity that got very lively at times, and it had earned them odd glances from eavesdroppers when they were out to dinner and having one of their discussions.

"We're not having an official meeting until tomorrow," Jessica reminded them. "So back to DeeDee's theory. The husband would have had to make sure the hired thugs beat him up enough that he wouldn't be suspected. But what if they

got too enthusiastic and killed him by accident?"

Mary nodded. "It seems like it would be too risky."

"It's funny how people spin these stories," DeeDee remarked. "I don't know what Andy would do if a couple of guys tried to take Zoe and Polly and me. I'd like to think he'd give them a good pounding."

Kaylee had to laugh at the thought of DeeDee's mild-mannered husband giving anyone a good pounding. She laughed a little harder when one of the shop's patrons gave her a horrified look as she passed their table. She must be a visitor. Most people who frequented the café were used to the Petals and their quirky ways.

"On that happy note, I'm going to head over to the shop," Mary announced, picking up her bag.

Mary was the part-time floral designer at The Flower Patch, and Kaylee was quite certain she couldn't run the shop without Mary's assistance.

"I'll meet you over there in a few minutes," Kaylee said.

Mary waved and hurried out the side door.

The front door opened, and Jay Akin, the local funeral director's son, walked in, followed closely by two men Kaylee didn't recognize.

The older man wore a suit that Kaylee estimated cost about a month's worth of sales at The Flower Patch. The younger man, who was the spitting image of his companion, wore a slightly less expensive suit, but he had the same aloof demeanor.

By contrast, Jay wore slightly wrinkled black pants and a casual shirt. His red hair was disheveled, as if he'd been running his fingers through it repeatedly, and there were bags under his eyes.

Kaylee was surprised by Jay's haggard appearance. It was unusual to see him this way. She'd gotten to know him pretty well over the past few months, thanks to their early running schedules that coincided most mornings. They'd come to enjoy their quiet

time in the park before the rest of Turtle Cove came to life.

On the mornings when Kaylee had gotten up but felt like she was dragging, Jay was the one with more energy, pushing her to do another half mile. Then again, he was fifteen years her junior, so she chalked up some of his seemingly boundless energy to that factor.

Kaylee waved at Jay, but he was focused on something the older man was saying, and he didn't seem to notice her.

Jessica leaned forward, eyebrows raised. "Who's that with Jay?" she asked, dropping her voice so they wouldn't hear. "He seems important." She tilted her head, regarding the stranger from different angles.

DeeDee glanced over at the men. "No idea."

Kaylee studied the man. His posture exuded authority, and he commanded attention. She couldn't help but notice that he was in charge of the conversation. His strong voice carried throughout the café, though she couldn't hear his exact words. She wondered what he was saying to Jay.

The younger stranger seemed detached from the conversation. He stared intently at something on his phone while the conversation swirled around him.

Jay seemed unsure what to do with his hands, moving them from his pockets to crossing them over his chest, then back again. He nodded while the older man continued speaking to him.

"Oh!" Kaylee said. "Jay told me the other morning that Giles Akin is hosting a convention for funeral directors, and the opening dinner is tonight. The man must be here for that. He definitely resembles a funeral director."

Jessica nodded. "The convention was a big topic at the last town meeting because the inn might not hold all the attendees. Giles was searching for an overflow location, and he wanted everyone to be prepared for an influx of business. Do you remember, DeeDee?"

"Of course I remember." DeeDee sniffed. "Giles and I planned an event at the bookshop during the convention." She shot Kaylee a teasing grin. "So what exactly does a funeral director look like?"

"You know what I mean," Kaylee said. "He has an air of seriousness, and he's wearing a suit."

"And a fancy suit at that. I guess death really does pay," Jessica commented, then stood. "I'm going to go take care of them."

DeeDee grinned. "You're just being nosy."

Jessica stuck her tongue out over her shoulder as she hurried behind the counter. "So what can I get you gentlemen this morning?" she asked brightly.

The two unfamiliar men stepped up to the counter, still reading the menu above Jessica's head.

"My son and I will have cappuccinos with almond milk," the older man said. "You do have alternate milks, don't you?"

"Absolutely," Jessica replied. "We have almond, soy, and coconut milk."

"Good. I hate it when little shops don't make considerations for people who don't meet their small-town stereotype," the man complained. "There are many people who don't drink cow's milk. We're just not meant to drink that. But there are a lot of closed-minded people on the subject who refuse to evolve with the times."

Kaylee and DeeDee glanced at each other. That sort of attitude wouldn't go over well with Jessica. A little shop? Closed-minded? And why was he so riled up about dairy products? Even before Jessica responded, Kaylee knew her friend was bristling.

Jessica paused, her fingers hovering over the cash register. "For a *little shop*, we're quite attuned with what people need and want in this day and age," she said. Her tone was still cheery to anyone who didn't know her well, but Kaylee could hear the contempt dripping through the words.

Kaylee turned slightly in her chair to get a better view of this train wreck.

"And I daresay that the people of this island are some of the most open-minded I've ever met," Jessica continued. She still smiled, but her dark eyes snapped.

Kaylee winced, sensing the storm that was about to be unleashed on their snobbish visitor. Maybe she should go help. She looked at her cup and saw that her latte was almost empty. Asking for a refill would be a good excuse to interrupt.

Jay stepped up to the counter, obviously sharing Kaylee's idea, and addressed Jessica. "Good morning. Can I get a double espresso, please?"

"Sure," Jessica said.

Kaylee walked up next to Jay, an extra reinforcement if needed between Jessica and the visitor. "I didn't know you were drinking coffee again," she said, giving Jay a hug. "We've missed our runs lately."

Jay stared down at his feet. "I know. I've been busy," he mumbled. "And tired. Hence the coffee."

"I get it," Kaylee said. "I hate it when real life interrupts good intentions."

A few weeks ago, Jay had told her that he was trying to get healthier. He planned to cut out red meat and caffeine from his diet and eat more vegetables. In addition, he was going to start lifting weights because he wanted to shed his thin frame and develop more muscle.

Kaylee figured he had his sights set on a potential girlfriend and was trying to up his game. Jay had admitted that he didn't have the easiest time talking to women.

But lately Jay hadn't been in the park, likely because he'd been working extra hours at the funeral parlor. His father, Giles, wanted him to be ready to take over the business in ten years or

so. Maybe he'd handed the reins of this big event over to his son.

Jessica shifted her attention to Jay. "So who are your friends?" she asked as she began filling their orders.

"Mitchum Landsdowne," Jay said. "He's in town for the convention. And this is Christopher, his son."

Christopher Landsdowne glanced up from his phone and nodded before returning his attention to his device.

"Apparently, Jay has forgotten my name," Jessica broke in. "I'm Jessica Roberts, owner of this café and proud saleswoman of many alternative milks."

Mitchum smiled at Jessica, displaying sparkling white teeth. "It's wonderful to meet you," he said, taking her hand and bringing it to his lips. "You have a lovely café in a lovely town. I remember seeing this place before when I've been here on business, but regrettably I never made it inside. I have a feeling it could become addictive." He winked at her. "Especially taking the almond milk into consideration."

"Thank you," Jessica said, then gestured to Kaylee. "This is Kaylee Bleu. She owns the flower shop next door."

Mitchum turned to Kaylee. "I'm pleased to meet you too."

Kaylee tried not to wrinkle her nose. He sounded like a shyster. She wasn't in the habit of judging people on the first meeting, but something about him set her teeth on edge. "Welcome to Turtle Cove," she said, shaking his hand.

"You run a flower shop, then?" Mitchum motioned to Jessica's prized geranium, Oliver, that sat proudly on the counter. "Maybe you can help Ms. Roberts with her plant. He's looking sad."

Jessica gazed at Oliver.

Kaylee knew her friend got very worried when Oliver drooped. "He's just a little thirsty," she suggested, then steered the conversation back to Mitchum. "I hope your convention goes well."

"I'm sure it will," Mitchum said, adjusting his glasses. "Despite

what people think, we funeral directors have many interesting things to talk about." He opened his wallet, removed a few bills, and dropped them into the tip jar.

"We love it when our little island gets visitors," Jessica said. She'd apparently forgiven Mitchum's initial comments about his milk preferences, because her tone was friendly. "It really makes us happy to be able to show off how great this town is. And as business owners, we love the extra sales."

"I'll bet," Mitchum said. "It's a wonderful opportunity for everyone. All the funeral directors are quite happy to be here." Then he said to Jay in a completely different, rather high-handed tone, "Are you getting our coffees?"

"Yes sir," Jay answered.

Kaylee caught the sarcasm in his tone, but Mitchum didn't seem to. He nodded at Jessica, then walked to the table in the far corner to wait for his minion to bring the order over.

Christopher followed his father. Kaylee wondered how he didn't bump into something, since he didn't glance up from his phone once.

Jessica raised her eyebrows and stared at Kaylee, who shrugged.

Kaylee turned to Jay. "So no runs for a few days?"

Jay sighed. "Not until the convention's over. I doubt I'll have the time or the energy to fit any in."

"Is everything okay?" she asked softly.

"What? Oh yeah. Sure," Jay said, glancing anxiously over his shoulder to where Mitchum checked his watch and his phone at the same time.

"He seems . . . challenging," Kaylee prompted.

Jay shrugged. "He's a big name in the biz," he said as if that explained everything.

"What do you mean?"

"He owns the Landsdowne Funeral Homes," Jay replied. "They've been expanding all over the state. Mitchum and his team have a good deal of influence. My dad is taking this convention very seriously, and he's paranoid about impressing Mitchum." He frowned. "Dad's making me entertain him."

"Why is Mitchum acting like you're his waiter?" Kaylee asked.

Jay reddened, then turned to Jessica. "Are those coffees ready?"

"Coming right up." She set the three cups on the counter.

Jay paid Jessica for the drinks, and she handed him the change.

Once Jay had the coffees in hand, he went over to the table where Mitchum and Christopher waited.

Mitchum tapped his foot, obviously impatient and doing his best to show Jay that the delay was hardly acceptable.

Kaylee got a coffee to go and returned to the table. She sat down next to DeeDee.

Her friend scrolled through something on her phone. "See," she said triumphantly, waving her phone around. "There's a whole comment thread that agrees with me."

"What are you talking about?" Kaylee asked, distracted by what was going on at Jay's table.

"A comment thread about the murder mystery I just read," DeeDee said. "A ton of people are saying the same things I did. The husband had to be in on it." She poked Kaylee. "Hey, you're not listening."

Kaylee faced DeeDee. "Oh. Sorry."

"What's going on over there?" DeeDee peered over at the corner where Jay and his companions were having a serious conversation.

Rather, Mitchum was having a serious conversation. Jay nodded, and every now and then he tried to get a word in edgewise, but it didn't seem to be working. Christopher was still preoccupied with his phone and didn't appear to be listening at all.

"I have no idea," Kaylee said.

Jessica returned to the table and slid into her seat. "Mitchum Landsdowne is kind of big for his britches," she commented. "I wonder if Giles is paying Jay overtime to take that abuse."

"I know. I feel terrible for Jay," Kaylee said. "But you seemed to forgive Mitchum pretty fast."

Jessica shrugged. "He made Jay pay, but he left a nice tip in the jar."

"He also insulted Oliver," Kaylee reminded her.

"True," Jessica conceded. "I hope it's not a bad sign that Oliver was droopy today. I gave him some of his favorite plant food."

"I'm sure he'll be fine," DeeDee reassured her.

"I need to go," Kaylee said. "I can't leave Mary alone to fend for herself. We've got a few orders, and tourist season will be starting soon." She took the last bite of her croissant and slung her bag over her shoulder.

"Call me later," Jessica said. "We need an agenda for our meeting tomorrow."

"I'll be sure to—" Kaylee stopped at the sound of Mitchum's angry voice reverberating through the café.

"I don't care about any of that," Mitchum snapped. His voice was low, but this time the words carried. "You owe me an answer."

Jay didn't say anything. He simply rose and shoved his chair aside, then stalked across the room and out the door.



Mitchum stared after Jay, then got up and followed, his expensive Italian shoes slapping against the floor.

Christopher, apparently just noticing he'd been left behind, rose with a sigh, picked up his to-go cup, and left the shop too.

Kaylee, DeeDee, and Jessica all gaped at one another.

"This is definitely going to be a long week for Jay," Kaylee said. "What do you think they were arguing about?"

DeeDee shrugged. "Maybe which crematory is the best one to use. Or who writes the most comprehensive obituaries," she suggested with a twinkle in her eyes. "Why are we so obsessed with these guys?"

Jessica smiled. "New blood. It's always interesting when visitors are in town. Not to mention, I'm totally intrigued by the funeral home business."

"You are?" DeeDee asked. "Since when?"

"Since always," Jessica said. "Giles has so many great stories when he stops in for coffee. Now that I think about it, I'm kind of surprised I haven't heard more hype about the convention."

"Me too," Kaylee admitted. "It seems odd. Everyone usually loves it when guests come to town."

"It doesn't look like Jay loves the guests," Jessica said. "Or at least not Mitchum Landsdowne."

"I'd better go." Kaylee raised an eyebrow at her friends. "Try not to get into trouble, all right?"

Jessica grinned. "Trouble? Us? I'm insulted."

Chuckling, Kaylee headed next door to The Flower Patch. She took a second to admire the Victorian mansion that housed

her flower shop. It painted a lovely picture against the spring backdrop. The Flower Patch sign hung above the lovely wrap-around porch, gold leaf spelling out the name against a deep green background. Baskets of hanging flowers, white wooden rockers, and wicker tables contributed to the homey feeling she had worked hard to cultivate.

As expected, Mary's car was in the parking lot. Unexpected, however, was Reese's black pickup. She couldn't help the smile that broke out on her face or the accelerated pounding of her heart. "Stop it," she said out loud. "I'm sure he's only here to pick something up or maybe to fix the window that won't shut right."

Kaylee was grateful for his help. Reese stopped by regularly to see if she needed something fixed. Deep down, she hoped it had less to do with obligation and more to do with liking her company.

She stepped inside. Bear was basking in the glow of the morning sun through the windows. His little paws rested on either side of his striped bow tie.

Kaylee crouched to scratch his ears. "How are you doing, Bear Dog?" she asked. "You ready for work?"

Bear sighed.

Kaylee laughed. "I feel the same way. I'm ready to go back to bed."

"Do you need a nap while you wait for your coffee to kick in?" Mary asked from the counter.

"No, I'll be fine. Bear can nap for both of us." He even had a bed in her second-floor office in case the main floor got too busy. There were some days she wanted to curl up on the pillow with him or on one of the couches in the consultation area, but she had to maintain a modicum of dignity if she wanted to make sure her customers would return.

"You're lucky to be right next door to the bakery. You can run over for more coffee whenever you need it." Reese leaned against the counter with a broad smile on his handsome face.

"I take advantage of that far too often," she told him.

Mary was arranging a vase of gorgeous *Hemerocallis*. The daylilies were bright shades of yellow and gold, with touches of maroon here and there and just the right amount of greenery. She set her scissors down. "I think that does it," she said.

Bear yipped.

"Your input on my designs is invaluable, Bear," Mary said with a smile.

Reese scratched behind Bear's ears, then handed Kaylee a travel mug filled with a thick green liquid. "I'm testing a new smoothie recipe, and I wanted you to try it and tell me what you think."

Kaylee grinned and accepted the drink. "How did you know I needed something healthy to balance out the coffee and chocolate I've had this morning? Did Mary tattle on me?"

Mary laughed. "I don't think Reese needs me to tell him how often we're at Jess's. He's a pretty smart guy. Besides, he already had that when he showed up."

"Good point." Kaylee laughed too.

Mary squeezed Kaylee's arm. "I'll get started on some of our other orders. And this needs a ribbon." She picked up the scissors and vase and retreated to the workroom.

Kaylee turned her attention back to Reese. "I didn't know you made smoothies," she said, taking a sip.

"They're my specialty. I'm a bachelor after all. What do you think?"

It was creamy and fruity and the perfect shade of green to convince her it was healthy. "It's delicious."

Reese grinned. "I'm glad you like it. I have another one

in the cooler in my truck. I think it'll make a nice midmorning pick-me-up." His phone rang, and he glanced at the screen. "Just a second."

She stashed her purse behind the counter and checked their orders list while he had a brief conversation. After he hung up, she gave him a questioning look.

"I have an emergency at Northern Lights," he explained with a sigh. "It's Monday morning, so there has to be an emergency, right?"

"Right," Kaylee replied. The Northern Lights Inn was one of the best places to stay in Turtle Cove, and this week it was full of Giles's funeral director friends. "What's going on?"

"There's a leak in one of the rooms. Of course, they're completely booked and can't move the guest to another room. They don't want to have to send anyone to a different hotel, so I need to figure it out fast."

"I'm sorry. Maybe dinner after work would help? That is, if your emergency gets solved."

Reese smiled. "How about O'Brien's at eight?"

"That sounds great," she said. O'Brien's seafood was always a treat, and Bear could join them because the restaurant featured a dog-friendly patio. She hated leaving him home alone.

"What's on your schedule for the day?" Reese asked.

"I'm planning to design some new bouquets for weddings and showers. It'll be nice to lie low and be creative. Hopefully there will be no floral emergencies," she added with a grin.

"That sounds like a good start to the week." Reese checked his watch. "I'd better head out. Should I pick you up at home or —"

He was cut off when the doorbell jingled. Giles Akin burst into the shop, followed by Nathan Anghelone and his wife, Abby.

Giles seemed flustered, which was odd for the island coroner and funeral home director. Given his line of work,

Giles was normally calm, cool, and collected. But today he wasn't wearing a suit jacket, his tie was askew, and his brown hair was mussed.

Kaylee wondered if whatever was bothering him had anything to do with Jay and Mitchum's apparent fight. But why would Giles be coming to tell her about it?

Nathan appeared more relaxed. He was about ten years younger than Giles, and he owned a funeral home in nearby Eastsound. Nathan had carefully styled jet-black hair, and he wore jeans and a casual button-down shirt. He looked more like someone who had stepped off the page of a fashion magazine than a funeral director. Kaylee assumed that Nathan was more composed than Giles because he was probably assisting Giles this week and not actually running the convention.

Abby acted downright delighted. She rushed over to the cooler and pressed her face against it. "Oh my goodness, those tulips!" she squealed. "How gorgeous! Nathan, come and see. The kids would love them."

Nathan walked over to stand next to his wife, nodding as she pointed out the various flowers.

"Kaylee, I need your help," Giles said, breathless. Then he seemed to remember his manners. "I'm sorry to interrupt, but I have a small emergency."

Reese chuckled. "That seems to be the theme of the day." He grinned at Kaylee. "I'll be in touch about tonight." With a nod, he walked out.

Kaylee focused her attention on Giles. "What's going on?" she asked. "Is everything all right?"

Giles grimaced. "Not really. I'm afraid my party-planning skills are sorely lacking. We're having our funeral directors' convention here in town this week, as you know."

Kaylee nodded. "I saw Jay this morning with Mitchum

Landsdowne and his son."

"You did?" Giles asked, frowning. "Where?"

"At the bakery."

Giles looked like he was about to say something but decided against it. "Tonight is our kickoff dinner at the park. I hired a caterer and rented the tent, the tables, and even the table linens. Enough for thirty people. I thought I'd taken care of everything."

"That sounds great," Kaylee said.

Giles sighed. "The trouble is, it's missing something. When I called Thelma over to get her opinion, she couldn't believe what I forgot."

Kaylee knew that Thelma, Giles's wife, would have a good perspective on whatever it was. "Well, don't keep me on the edge of my seat. What did you forget?" But she had a sinking feeling she already knew.

"Flowers," Nathan supplied from across the room, where he was rubbing Bear's belly.

Giles nodded sadly. "Yes, and lots of them."

Kaylee stifled a groan, watching her relaxed Monday evaporate before her eyes. "How many arrangements do you need?"

"We have six tables for the dinner, and we'd also like some arrangements on the food tables, as well as some standing arrangements to be scattered around the tent," Giles said, his expression reminding her of Bear's when he'd done something wrong.

"I don't mean any disrespect," Kaylee said, "but you handle funerals with lots of flowers. How did you forget the flowers?"

Giles hung his head, dejected. "There have been so many details to this week that flowers must have simply slipped through the cracks. I'm sorry to put so much pressure on you."

Nathan started strolling around the room again but not before Kaylee saw him smile at his friend's discomfort.

"Let's have a seat and figure out exactly what you need,"

Kaylee said, leading Giles over to the sitting area that she used for consultations. She motioned to a chair.

"You can do it?" Giles asked, his relief apparent.

Kaylee gave him a smile. The man didn't need to feel guiltier than he already did. "It won't be easy, but yes, we can do it."

"Thank you," Giles said, taking a seat. "You're a godsend. Truly."

"I don't know about that," Kaylee said, pulling out the binder of arrangement examples she used for events. She sat down next to him. "What's the overall theme of the dinner? What's the mood you're hoping to achieve?"

Giles widened his eyes. He appeared panicked again.

Kaylee suppressed a smile. Giles could put together the most tasteful and beautiful way to see someone off to the afterlife, but he couldn't figure out how to plan a dinner for a group of living people.

"I don't know," Giles said. He glanced at Nathan. "Formal, I guess."

Nathan shrugged as if to say, *How should I know?*

"It's all right. We'll find something." Kaylee opened the binder and flipped through the pages. "How about one of these?" She pointed out a few pictures.

Giles was silent as he studied them.

"We could do dahlias," Kaylee suggested. "We have them in a number of colors. I could add other flowers to make the arrangements more interesting, but dahlias would be your main draw."

Nathan joined them and peered over Kaylee's shoulder. "Those look fine to me. What do you think, Abby?" He waved his wife over.

She left the fresh blooms to come and study the book. "They're absolutely lovely. I think they'd be perfect. Don't you, Giles?"

"Lovely. Perfect," Giles echoed. "How fast can you get the

arrangements done and delivered? Our cocktail hour begins at seven."

Kaylee cringed inwardly, picturing all the work ahead of her and Mary to pull this order off on such short notice. Once again, she thought longingly of her original plan to spend the day taking it easy, putting a few arrangements together, and sketching out some new ideas.

But duty called, and she was never one to shirk it.

Besides, she liked Giles and wanted his event to be a success.

Not to mention, Kaylee knew what it was like to miss an important detail. Before moving to Turtle Cove, Kaylee had been a plant taxonomy professor at the University of Washington in Seattle and occasionally served as a forensic botanist for the Seattle police. She had understood that life and known all the ins and outs. But when her position at the university was eliminated and she'd bought The Flower Patch from her grandmother, Kaylee had been completely lost. She'd frequently missed or forgotten orders. She was lucky that Mary had been there to back her up and keep things on track.

Kaylee smiled brightly at Giles. "Let's go over to the park and check out the setup. In the meantime, I'll ask Mary to start putting some of the table centerpieces together. Are the tables round?"

Nathan nodded.

As if sensing that she was needed, Mary came out of the workroom and joined them in the consultation area. She greeted Giles, Nathan, and Abby.

"Can you start on some centerpieces for Giles's event tonight?" Kaylee asked.

"Sure thing," Mary answered. "What kind of event is it?"

"An outdoor dinner in a tent." Kaylee pointed to the arrangement they'd settled on. "Something along these lines, for round

tables. I'm going over to the park with Giles to get a better sense of the setup."

Mary nodded. "You got it." She smiled at them and patted Giles's shoulder. "Don't worry. We'll make sure it's a night everyone will remember."