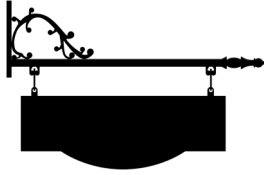


# 3



“What’s up?” Kate asked when her sister trudged into the Inn’s kitchen. “You took your time.”

“Yeah, sorry.”

Jillian’s face looked positively ghastly, and Kate thumped the can of raisins down on the worktop, where she was mixing bran muffins for the morning buffet.

“What’s wrong?”

“You’re not gonna believe it.”

“Try me.” Kate stepped around the island and walked over to Jillian, studying her dismal expression for clues.

“It’s Stan Chappell,” Jillian said.

Kate frowned. “Is that ...”

“You know, at the bookstore.”

“Oh, right.”

“He’s dead. Murdered.”

Kate froze. “What?”

Nodding miserably, Jillian sank onto a stool. “I found him lying there when I went to get the book I ordered.”

“*Around the World ...?*”

“Yeah, but I didn’t get it. I walked in, and Stanley was just lying there on the floor, and there was nobody else in the store.”

“Oh, man! Did you call Rick?”

“I called 911. Rick’s there now. Dave Hall got there first.”

“He’s only been with the department, what? Six or eight months?”

“Rick came right away, and Geordie too. I think Geordie’s gone to tell the family now.”

“Was it totally horrible?”

“Yes. I checked for a pulse. There wasn’t one.”

“Do they know what happened?” Kate asked.

“Looks like he was shot. I tried not to look, but ... Rick sent for the medical examiner, but he hadn’t arrived when I left.”

“Wow. He’s probably got to drive down from Bangor.” Kate let it sink in for a moment then snapped back to the present. “I’ll get you some iced tea.”

“Thanks.”

“I’ve been baking. Everyone’s out at the carnival. I made blueberry muffins earlier, and now I’m making bran. Want one?”

“I’m not sure I can eat, but the tea sounds good.”

Kate poured two glasses and gave one to Jillian. “I’ll join you as soon as I get a pan of these in the oven.” Quickly she measured out the raisins, stirred them into her batter, and scooped a blob into each muffin cup.

“We’re not supposed to tell anyone yet,” Jillian said after a sip of her tea. “Rick says it will probably be on tonight’s news, but he was concerned about family members hearing about it before they were told officially, so it’s just between you and me for now.”

“Okay.” Kate retrieved her iced tea and sat down near her sister. “Wasn’t Mr. Roofner there?”

“No, apparently he’d gone to Bangor this afternoon. His son wasn’t there either.” It did seem a little odd, since Carl had told her he hoped for a lot of traffic in the store during the carnival, and he hadn’t mentioned the book fair when he’d called her that morning. They both sat in silence for a moment. Jillian took another swallow of tea and looked up. “Any new reservations?”

Kate shook her head. “The only person I’ve seen all day is Mindy.”

Mindy Nelson, their part-time maid, walked in as if on cue. As usual, she wore full makeup, but her lipstick looked a little worse for wear. She stripped her bandana from her shoulder-length brown hair. “Hey, Jillian.”

“Hello.” Jillian managed a smile that didn’t look forced.

“All done?” Kate asked.

“Yeah, finally,” Mindy said. “It took me a long time to clean all the rooms today.”

“Well, we’re full to bursting. You want some tea?”

“No, thanks,” Mindy said. “I think I’ll head home. My mom’s with the kids, but it’s been a long day.”

“Thanks so much for coming in on a Saturday,” Jillian said.

“I’ll be back Monday morning, if you two can handle towels and trash in the meantime.”

“Sure we can,” Kate said.

Mindy smiled then sobered. “Oh, I meant to tell you—you know that guy in Rip Van Winkle?”

“Yeah.” How could Kate forget the thirty-something man who’d taken the small front room on the third floor two days ago? As if his dark eyes and windblown hair hadn’t been enough, he had a killer smile and a day’s worth of stubble on his chin. She’d had to scold herself for staring. “His car has a New York license plate.”

Mindy shrugged at this bit of data. “He’s had his Do Not

Disturb card on the doorknob since Thursday. I knocked and asked if he wanted cleaning, but he said no, so I left him alone.”

“Some people just want a quiet getaway,” Jillian said.

Kate nodded. “He came down for breakfast this morning after everyone else had left for the day. In fact, I was putting stuff away. All the bacon was gone, but I offered to fix more. He said, ‘Don’t bother.’ But he took some of the sausage and finished up the eggs in the warmer. And I think he took a doughnut and a muffin up to his room with his second cup of coffee.” She stopped to take a breath. Mindy and Jillian stared at her.

“Well, I guess we know he’s not going to starve,” Mindy said. “Tell me, what was he wearing?”

“Yes,” Jillian said. “And what color are his eyes?”

Kate flushed and stood. “You guys are mean.”

Their laughter echoed in the spacious kitchen.

“On that note, I’m going. Just remember to ask him if he needs anything if you see him again.” Mindy waved and went out through the dining room.

“So, we have a mystery guest.” Jillian drained her iced tea.

Kate took the tumbler from her and headed for the dishwasher with both glasses in hand. “Maybe he’s a writer. They like peace and quiet.”

“You could be right.” Jillian leaned back and peered through the dining room door. “I thought I heard—yep.” She jumped up, and Kate heard it too. Someone had come in the front door. “I’ll get it.” Jillian disappeared toward the lobby.

Kate heard animated voices as she loaded their glasses and a few other dirty dishes then checked on her muffins.

“That was the Andersons,” Jillian said as she returned. “They saw the police cars downtown and came home with a rumor that someone had died at the bookstore.”

“What did you say?”

“Nothing much. Just, ‘Oh, that’s too bad.’”

Jillian drifted out to the office. By the time Kate finished the cleanup from her baking session, guests were filtering back and forth through the lobby. Most were going out again for dinner.

“Let’s stay in tonight,” Jillian said.

“Sure. Do you want me to go down to the house and fix us some supper?” The sisters lived behind the inn, in the converted carriage house that was once their parents’ home.

“Okay. I’ll stay near the front desk until Wayne gets here.”

Kate shrugged. “I may keep you company.”

“You don’t want to go to the concert at the school tonight?”

“I don’t think so. Let’s play a game or something.”

They spent a peaceful evening until ten minutes to ten, when Wayne came in.

“Man, you’re busy this weekend. The parking lot’s crowded.” He stamped snow from his boots on the doormat just inside the lobby.

“We’re full up,” Kate said, gathering the Dutch Blitz cards off the desk where she and Jillian had been playing.

“Anything I need to know?”

“Everyone’s in for the night except the David Copperfield room.” Jillian pushed her chair back and stood. “I expect they’ll be in soon. If anyone asks, we’re serving a full breakfast in the morning.”

“Right. Dining room opens at seven on Sunday.” Wayne grinned at her.

At fifty-two, Wayne had been glad to pick up some weekend work over the winter. He and his wife ran a seasonal business, renting out six cottages on their property from Memorial Day through the fall foliage season. Any extra income during the off-season was welcome. Kate and Jillian

had a regular weeknight clerk, Don Reece, but the student who'd filled in on weekends over the summer had left them when he returned to school before Labor Day.

Kate brought her parka and Jillian's from the office.

"Have a good night, ladies," Wayne called as they headed for the back door via the kitchen.



The next morning, breakfast was busy between seven and eight. Another wave would hit later. The late sleepers always came down to eat before the kitchen closed and the hot foods were put away.

"I think enough people have eaten that I can handle the rest on my own," Kate told her.

"Are you sure? I'd like to go to church this morning."

"Yes, go," Kate said. "I'll go to the evening service."

Jillian went out the back door to get ready. Not long after Kate heard her car go up the driveway from the carriage house, the couple staying in the Scarlett O'Hara Room came down with their four-year-old daughter in tow.

"Good morning," Kate called out. She made sure the coffee and hot water container had plenty to offer the guests.

"Hi." Mrs. Durant was fixing a plate for her daughter while her husband put a booster seat in a chair and strapped it in place.

"Can I get anything for you, Mrs. Durant?" Kate asked.

"It looks like you've thought of everything. And call me Sheila."

"Okay." Kate smiled. "Did you enjoy the Winter Carnival yesterday?"

"Yes. The snowmen were so funny. I think that contest was the highlight for me."

“Who won?” Kate asked. “They were just getting started when I was there.”

“A group of women, actually. They called themselves the Book Worm Club.”

“Oh, I know most of them.” Kate grinned. “It’s a monthly book club, but I think they spend more time on tea and gossip than they do on their reading selections.”

“Well, their snowman—snowperson—was a very cool librarian with an icy book in her hand. They said it was Shakespeare’s *A Winter’s Tale*.”

“That’s appropriate. Did the Statue of Liberty place?”

Sheila grimaced. “Unfortunately, by the time the judges got to her, her arm had collapsed. I think it just got too warm, although that made it more pleasant for those of us who were watching. Second place went to a dinosaur, and third prize was for a classic Frosty.”

Mr. Durant took a banana and peeled it for his daughter. “I think Gabby liked the skating pond best, although she fell down about a gazillion times.”

Sheila laughed. “It was her first time ever on skates. I was surprised they had some small enough for her.”

“I think the parent-teacher group at the elementary school collects them,” Kate said. “They get them out every year at carnival time, for visitors and kids who just don’t have their own.”

“Well, she loved it,” Mr. Durant said. “Right, Gabby?”

The little girl smiled and nodded vigorously, her mouth full of banana.

“Say, we heard about someone being killed in town—at a bookstore.” Sheila’s face wrinkled. “It was on the morning news.”

Kate shot a swift glance at Gabby, but she seemed more

interested in the scrambled eggs and sausage her dad had placed in front of her than the conversation.

“Yes. One of the employees at the Book Rack.”

“Did you know him?” Sheila asked.

“Only slightly. My sister knew him better. The bookstore is one of favorite haunts.”

“Such a shame.” Sheila picked up a plate.

Another woman had come in while they talked, and she paused with a mug in her hand. “I was in there yesterday.”

Kate turned to her in surprise. “Really?”

“Yes, I bought a book about hiking trails in the area. I thought we might come back in the summertime. It must be beautiful here then.”

“It is, and we’d love to have you come back,” Kate said. “What time were you at the bookstore?”

“It was in the morning, before some of the activities started. My husband and I thought it would be a good time to stroll through town. The downtown is so quaint.”

Kate nodded. “Well, the ... incident took place in the afternoon, or at least that’s my understanding.”

“Good thing we weren’t in there then.” She strolled along the buffet counter, picking out her breakfast dishes.

“Did anyone else come in while you were there, Mrs. Hoban?” Kate asked.

“A few people. It wasn’t really busy though.” The woman seemed very serious as she considered the pastry display.

“Maybe you should talk to the police officers investigating the crime. My brother’s one of them.”

“Oh, really?” Mrs. Hoban perked up a little. “Sure, we can talk to him if you think it would help, but we were probably long gone before—you know.” She shot a glance at the Durants, who sat at a nearby table.

“Right. Well, I’ll be in the office if you need anything.



Would you like me to tell Officer Gage you were in the bookstore yesterday? They'd probably like to talk to anyone who was there."

Mrs. Hoban took one of Kate's bran muffins, as well as a cruller. "Sure. Why not?"

Kate smiled. "I'll let my brother know. Will you be out today?"

"Yes, but we'll be back this afternoon, probably by four or so."

Kate nodded. "If you can remember any details about the other people in the bookstore, you might want to jot them down. Enjoy your day."