

**In *Hook, Line & Sinker*, bestselling novelist Harlan Thrombey is at his cutthroat best. Retired actor Truman Flynn has been found dead on the shore of a lake with no sign of his fishing boat, but there is a long trail of blood and an even longer trail of suspects.**

**Truman's wealthy business partners, his caregiver, and a mysterious visitor all have a motive to shatter the calm of this remote lake town. Now a weatherbeaten police chief and his trusted deputy must sift through the clues to find the killer.**



Harlan Thrombey began his career with a rusty, old Smith Corona typewriter and made himself into one of the best-selling mystery writers of all time. His 54 novels and 18 short story collections have been translated into more than 30 languages and boast over 2 billion copies sold. He is often credited with revitalizing the whodunnit genre and has lovingly been dubbed 'The Red King' by his devoted readers. He lives on an estate in New England far from city life... but not far enough from nearest family members.

**BLOOD  
LIKE  
WINE**

PUBLISHING

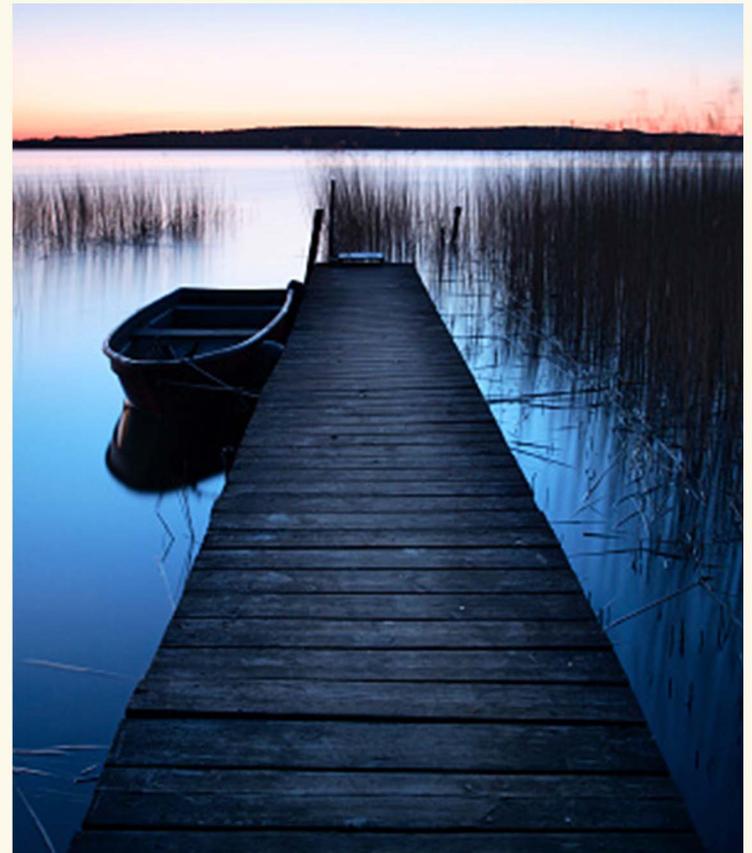
[blwpublishing.com](http://blwpublishing.com)

© 2019 Lions Gate Entertainment Inc. All Rights Reserved.

FROM THE **Knives Out** MYSTERY COLLECTION

# Hook, Line & Sinker

H  
O  
O  
K,  
L  
I  
N  
E  
&  
S  
I  
N  
K  
E  
R



H  
A  
R  
L  
A  
N  
'  
T  
H  
R  
O  
M  
B  
E  
Y

# Harlan Thrombey

# Hook, Line & Sinker

Harlan Thrombey



*To my beloved readers  
Thank you for your love and loyalty*



Judy Flynn set her book down, the lower left corner aligning precisely with the edges of the kitchen countertop. Reaching for a glass, she took a moment to appreciate the tidy little rows that lined the open cabinet. “Soldier goblets” is what her uncle, Truman Flynn, called them. Her uncle was a much less meticulous person than she, but they’d rubbed along well in the last fifteen years they’d been living together.

As she filled the glass with water, her eyes caught on a long strand of grey hair clinging to her sleeve. Setting her half-full glass on the counter, she pinched the hair between her fingers and deposited it into the bin under the sink. The wayward strand was a reminder that while she may be thirty years younger than her uncle, she was still no spring chicken. It was also a reminder that today was laundry day.

Wind charms hanging at the edge of the covered porch chimed in the gentle breeze, and she slid the window open.

Early morning air filled the room, billowing the short curtains that lined the top of the sill, and carrying with it the crisp scent of fall.

Staring out into the late twilight, Judy let her gaze touch on everything familiar—the lake that stretched as far as the eye could see, the boat house where her uncle kept his two boats, the friendly seating of Adirondack chairs around a fire pit. The peacefulness of it suited her as did the isolation. Even the curtains which were filled with caricatures of movie stars from the fifties and sixties—all her uncle’s colleagues and friends—and which served no purpose other than to make him laugh, were comfortable in their familiarity.

Glancing down at her watch, Judy calculated that she had thirty-three minutes left before she needed to start her morning routine. Reaching for her book and her water, intending to take both into the comfort of the library, her morning suddenly took an unpleasant and unexpected turn.

A shot rang out from somewhere across the lake. In her surprise, the glass slid from her grip and shattered into dozens of shards. The shot had been far enough away to not pose a danger, but as she stared down at the sparkling glass scattered across the dark wood of the kitchen floor, she sighed. Her morning routine was definitely ruined.



Kathy Flores placed a hand on her husband’s shoulder and watched the monitor as he navigated his way through the spreadsheets open on his computer. Neither she nor

Charles minded working all hours of the day and all days of the week—it was a small price to pay for the success of their company. They’d built Lion’s Pride together, and seeing the iconic lion’s head logo gracing everything from contracts to sponsored sports and entertainment events was well worth the lost hours of sleep.

“It looks good,” she said, quickly assimilating the information.

“It does,” Charles agreed. A loud thump, followed by a slamming door sounded overhead. A moment later, the deafening sound of a screaming guitar filled the entire house.

“Angela!” they both shouted, though it was unlikely their daughter could hear them.

Charles quickly switched to another app on his computer and disconnected Angela from the Bluetooth audio system that linked the entire house. Just as quickly as the music had started, it died.

“You guys suck!” came Angela’s voice, muted through the walls.

Charles chuckled. “We must be doing something right then?”

“Use the sound system in your room,” Kathy shouted back to their daughter then smiled at her husband. She wasn’t entirely sure they were doing much right with Angela, but it wasn’t a thought she dwelled on.

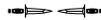
“So shall we?” Charles gestured to the spreadsheets now back on the monitor. A real estate deal in London. Profitable projects that were worthy of the Lion’s Pride

reputation were hard to come by in London. But this one looked to be a good fit.

She nodded. Charles clicked over to the letter of intent the prime contractor of the development had sent. It wasn't a contract, but an agreement to enter into negotiations. If they decided they wanted out, they'd be able to find a way.

Charles signed the document electronically, then turned in his chair to look up at her. "I think we should celebrate."

A boat engine revved loudly out on the lake, and Kathy glanced outside. Clouds were moving in, obscuring the early morning sun and darkening the sky. She turned back to Charles and smiled. "I agree. A celebration sounds perfect."



Soaked to the bone from an unexpected, and torrential, downpour, James "Jimmy" Stevens toed off his tennis shoes before stepping into his motel room. As the door slowly closed, he paused in front of the mirrors on the closet doors. The shoes he held in his hand, once a brilliant purple, were now caked in mud. At least his black tech jacket and training pants weren't completely ruined. He didn't think.

Jimmy opened the closet and yanked the complimentary plastic laundry bag from the coat hanger it was clipped to. Then methodically, he placed his shoes, and every stitch of clothing he was wearing, inside.

And if his hands shook just a little bit, he refused to acknowledge it.



"Between the blood trail and the sizable gash on the piling, I'm thinking there was a boat involved, and it came in hot," Silas Carter, Chief of Police said to Grace Abel, his highest ranking deputy.

"There's no boat now," she said.

Silas's attention went from the fresh gash in the wood that he'd been studying to the expanse of the blue lake before him. From where he was kneeling on the dock, he turned and looked over his shoulder at Grace.

"Really? That's all you've got?"

She narrowed her eyes at him. "Other than the blood trail that leads from the end of the dock to the beach, the dead body on the beach, the random button we found *under* the body, and that gash in the wood, yeah, that's all I got."

A sarcastic remark hovered on his tongue, but Grace was one of his mother's closest friends, and being her boss would not stop her from taking a strip off his hide.

He rose, and in silence they followed the blood trail that traced its way along the right side of the dock all the way to the public beach. The beach where the body of eighty-seven-year-old retired actor, Truman Flynn, had been laid out. His hands had even been crossed over his abdomen.

Stopping where the dock met the sand, Silas studied the ground. Unfortunately, an early morning storm had obscured any footprints that might have been left.

"You forgot the watch," he said as Sarah George, the medical examiner, directed her team to remove the body. In addition to the scant evidence Grace had listed off, Flynn had been wearing a Breitling watch with a shattered face

which had stopped at 7:27. There wasn't a lot to go on, and every item counted.

"And the fact that he was stabbed," Grace added. Sarah had confirmed the wound, but hadn't committed to that wound being the cause of death.

"There is that," he said.

Grace's phone dinged, and she dug the device out of her jacket pocket.

"The warrant just came in to search his house," she said, showing him the text message from one of the deputies riding office duty. "How do you feel about a little drive?"

Silas let out a long exhale. There weren't many murders in this part of rural New York, and it was possible that Flynn's death didn't have anything to do with that stab wound. But with a missing boat and a blood trail, it was hard not to suspect foul play.



Despite having a warrant, Silas knocked on Flynn's door. The retired actor had been a permanent fixture in town since his arrival in the area twenty years ago, but the woman everyone knew lived with him was more of an enigma. She was seen so rarely that he wondered if she was more a visitor than permanent resident. Either way, rumor had it she was his niece, although not even Grace had been able to confirm that.

"Hello." A woman who looked to be in her late fifties answered the door. Blinking at them from behind a pair of

thick spectacles, she hovered with one hand on the door and the other on the frame.

"Ma'am," he said with an official nod. "I'm Silas Carter, Chief of Police, and this is Deputy Grace Abel. Can we come in?"

She blinked at them again then frowned. "I imagine you're perfectly capable of coming in."

Silas studied her, looking for any signs of mockery, but whoever this woman was, she simply stared back at him.

"Might I ask who you are?" He paused, then rephrased the question. "Who are you?"

"Judy Flynn."

"Any relation to Truman Flynn?"

She nodded. "He's my uncle." Well that answered that question.

Silas cast a look at Grace then turned his attention back to Ms. Flynn. "Ms. Flynn, we'd like to talk to you about your uncle. May we come in?"

Without hesitation, Judy Flynn stepped back and let them in. After shutting the door, she led them past a sweeping wooden staircase, down a center hall, and into a room with bowed windows that looked out onto the lake.

She gestured to two chairs as she took a seat on a small sofa. Books on history and game theory were neatly stacked on the coffee table along with a lone crossword puzzle. It was only half complete, and Silas recognized it as the one published in last Sunday's New York Times.

"My uncle asks me to do those," Ms. Flynn said, having noticed where his attention had caught. "Crosswords are

random and frivolous. I prefer numbers and patterns, but Truman says I need to play with words. It's easier to just do them and make him happy than to argue."

Silas blinked. The Sunday puzzle and the concept of "easy" weren't two things that belonged in the same sentence as far as he was concerned.

"Do you live here with your uncle?" Silas asked.

Ms. Flynn nodded. "I manage his house and finances. Why are you here?"

"When was the last time you saw your uncle?" he asked rather than answer her question.

"Last night at 10:53 when I went to bed. I stopped in his room to make sure he'd taken his medication."

"And you didn't see him this morning?"

Ms. Flynn cocked her head and frowned at him. After a beat, she spoke. Slowly. "The last time I saw him was last night at 10:53."

Silas took a mental deep breath. "Apologies, you did say that. It's now nearly noon, is it unusual for you to not see him in the morning?"

Ms. Flynn glanced out the window. "Usually we have breakfast together, but some days he likes to get up early to go fishing. When I didn't see him, I walked down to the boathouse, and his fishing boat was gone, so I assumed that's what he was doing."

Beside him, Grace shifted at the mention of the boat.

"Ms. Flynn," he said. "I'm sorry to have to tell you, but your uncle's body was found this morning on one of the public beaches. He's dead," he added, thinking it better to

be black and white on the issue.

Her body remained still, except for her eyes. She blinked at them in a rapid series of three blinks at a time. "Oh."

Silas waited for her to ask the questions that usually followed—how, when, and the most difficult, why—but as the silence stretched, Ms. Flynn didn't fill it.

"Did you hear your uncle leave this morning?" Grace asked.

Ms. Flynn shook her head. "No, I came down to get a glass of water at 7:15, and he must have been gone before that because I didn't see or hear anything, other than the gunshot, after that."

"Gunshot?" he asked.

"It startled me," she said. "I was holding a glass of water, and I dropped it. I know it's close to hunting season, but that early in the morning it seemed out of place."

"Could you tell what direction it came from?" Silas asked.

"No."

"Any guesses?"

"Loud enough to be close, but sometimes sounds ricochet around the lake, so no, I don't have any guesses either." She stared at him, her hands clasped in her lap.

"May we take a look around the house? I'd like to send a forensic team over later today, but for now, Deputy Abel and I would appreciate it if we could see your uncle's room, and if he had one, an office?" He'd considered asking her more questions, but decided his time could be put to better

use at the moment.

Ms. Flynn nodded, rose, and led them up the ornate staircase. They wrapped around the landing then proceeded up a second set of stairs and into a suite of rooms.

“That’s his bedroom,” she gestured to an open door to their right. “This is his sitting room, and his office is through there,” she said pointing to another open door that sat opposite the bedroom.

“I’ll,” Ms. Flynn paused in an uncharacteristic display of hesitancy. “I don’t feel right being in here. I’ll wait for you downstairs.” And before she’d finished the sentence, she turned on her heels and started back down the stairs.

Silas glanced at Grace who raised an eyebrow at him.

“Nice room he has here,” she said, nodding toward the bobcat skin rug that hung on the wall.

“The only opinions we’re here to form are those that might have anything to do with Flynn’s death,” Silas said.

“Maybe the woodland creatures took revenge on him for displaying their colleague in such a tacky way.”

Silas shook his head. “I’ll take the office, you take the bedroom.”

Fifteen minutes later, his deputy joined him in Flynn’s office. “The bedroom is remarkably sparse,” she said. “Clothes neatly hung, a few novels on his bedside table, and some medications in the bathroom cabinet that we should have the forensics folks take a look at. But other than that, nothing that jumps out as being a motive for murder.”

“Why does Lion’s Pride sound familiar?” he asked,

holding up an unsigned contract with the name of the company and the logo.

“That’s the Floreses’ company,” she said.

Silas had a love hate relationship with the way Grace seemed to know everything about their town—personally, it was irritating, but professionally, he had to admit it came in handy.

“The Floreses live on the other side of the point,” she said, gesturing to the north. “They’re from New York, but they’ve been weekenders here for about fifteen years. Why?”

“It looks like Flynn was going to invest in some development project with them,” he said, holding up the document.

Grace shrugged. “We don’t have any other leads. They live ten minutes away, and I’ve heard their house is spectacular.”



“This is quite a display you have, Mr. and Ms. Flores,” Silas said, eyeing the floor to ceiling glass-enclosed shelving that ran the length of the sitting room where they all gathered.

“Please, call us Charles and Kathy,” Charles said. “Both my wife and I are collectors of odds and ends. The awards are, of course, ones that Lion’s Pride has won over the years. And the rocket models are mine—I’m an investor in a space exploration company, it’s kind of a childhood dream. The rest are just little things we’ve picked up over

the years: the Pakistani bridal jewelry we bought from a dealer in Karachi, the powder horn is from Scotland, and then there's Kathy's favorite, the baseball signed by Willie Mays." Charles flashed a smile at his wife, and she gave them a sheepish look.

"I'm a huge baseball fan," she said. "Paid a fortune for it, but I don't regret it all. Have you eaten? Can I get you either of you something? A drink?"

Silas shook his head and, seated beside him, Grace declined as well. "We've come to ask you about Truman Flynn," he said. "We understand he was going to invest in one of your projects?"

"Was going to invest?" Kathy asked. "I assure you, he's fully committed to it."

"He died this morning, Ms. Flores."

Charles straightened, and Kathy gasped, her hand flying to the base of her throat.

"Died?" Kathy whispered, reaching for her husband's hand.

"I'm afraid so," Silas said.

"That's terrible," Charles said. "We've been seeing a lot of him lately as we planned this project. He was a little quirky, but we both really liked him."

"Quirky?" Grace asked.

"When was the last time you saw him?" Silas said, cutting off Grace's question.

The Floreses looked at each other for a moment, then Charles spoke. "You had a meeting with him two days ago, didn't you Kathy?"

Kathy frowned, then nodded. "I did, just a brief one. Charles stayed in New York so he could bring Angela, our daughter, up after school on Friday, but I came on Wednesday. Truman stopped by to pick up the most recent investment package. He was only here for about five minutes—he had a dinner plan or something."

"And you haven't seen him since?" Silas asked. They both shook their heads.

"Did you hear or see anything unusual this morning?"

They shared another look, then Charles spoke. "We heard a boat rev its engine pretty loudly. I don't know what time it was exactly, maybe 7:30?"

Kathy nodded. "An engine revving like that is an odd thing to hear in the off season. After September, it's just fishermen, and they tend to be quiet."

"Well, thank you for your time," Silas said, rising from his seat. Grace hesitated then followed. "We may stop by again if we have any additional questions."

Still holding hands, Kathy and Charles rose as well. "Of course," Charles said. "We have to head back to the city in a few days, but if you need us, here's my contact info." He pulled a card from his wallet and handed it to Silas who thanked him and slid it into his pocket.

"Lion's Pride, it's an interesting name," Silas commented as they made their way to the front of the house.

Both Charles and Kathy chuckled. "We're often mistaken as being Chinese," Charles said as they reached the door. "The lion is smaller, faster, more agile, and definitely more opportunistic than a tiger."

“They’re also more social,” Kathy interjected.

Charles nodded. “So as a bit of a joke, we chose the lion for our logo.”

“And made it iconic,” Silas said.

The Floreses both smiled and nodded.

Silas thanked them again, and he and Grace said their goodbyes. They were almost to their car when Charles called, “Chief Carter?”

Silas turned.

“Do you know how Truman died?”

It was an odd time to ask that question. “Unknown at this time,” he called back.

Kathy inched closer to her husband. “We’ll reach out to his niece to see if there is anything we can do,” she said.

Silas thought Judy Flynn probably already had everything arranged down to what time the last clump of dirt would fall on her uncle’s casket, but he nodded. “I’m sure she’d appreciate that.”

Seemingly satisfied with his answer, the couple turned and shut the door, leaving Silas and Grace in the driveway.

“They’re hiding something,” Grace said.

“Yes, they are. And we’ll find out what, just not today.”

“Or I could just tell you.”

Silas spun to see a young girl wearing hiking boots, jeans, and a sweater standing in the woods to their left. She had a bright pink scarf hanging around her neck and carried a bag.

“Angela I presume?” Silas said.

She nodded but didn’t come out of the woods.

“How old are you?”

“Sixteen, and yeah, I watch enough cop shows to know you can’t question me without a guardian present, but I can just talk to you.”

“True,” Silas said. “What do you want to talk about?”

Her gaze went to the house and lingered for a moment before returning to him. “Mr. Flynn was here this morning. Early, like around 6:30 or something. He came on his boat and had a big fight with my parents over some stupid investment or something. I heard him say he wanted out.”

“In my experience, most teenagers aren’t up at 6:30 on a Saturday morning. Unless they didn’t go to bed the night before?”

Angela rolled her eyes at him. “Whatever, yeah, I was out with some of the other kids down the lake. I’d just fallen asleep when the shouting started.”

“How long did it last?”

She shrugged. “Maybe ten minutes? My mom tried to soothe everything over and offered Mr. Flynn some salabat. He stayed for maybe another ten minutes then left.”

“What’s salabat?” Grace asked.

Angela shot her a scathing look. “It’s a kind of tea, a Filipino tea with ginger.”

“So that’s where you’re from,” Grace said.

If anything, Angela’s look turned from scathing to unadulterated teenage disgust. “I’m *from* Brooklyn Heights. Geez, you’re like everything that’s wrong with this world.”

“You said your mom offered him the tea,” Silas cut in. “What about your dad?”

Angela switched her focus back to him and shrugged again. “He left the house for a while. Didn’t come back until after Mr. Flynn was gone.”

Silas considered this for a moment, then nodded to the bag she wore. “What’s that?”

For the first time, Angela looked every year of her sixteen years young, and she dipped her head. Her long black hair fell to cover her face. “Mushrooms, actually.”

“The magic kind?” Grace said.

“The wild kind, right Angela?” Silas corrected. He wasn’t even sure if they had hallucinogenic mushrooms in the area, but he *did* know that if Angela had been collecting them, she wouldn’t have said as much.

“My mom and I like to cook with them. This time of year, it’s the only good thing about this place. The lake’s too cold to swim in, and snow hasn’t fallen yet. Everything is dying, and so mushrooms are the only thing I look forward to.”

On that cheery thought, Silas thanked the girl, then he and Grace climbed into their police-issued SUV.

“Well, now we know at least one of the Floreses’ secrets,” Grace said as she pulled on her seatbelt.

“At least one,” Silas agreed.



“The uniforms are out knocking on doors again today,” Grace said, setting a cup of coffee in front of Silas.

“We *are* the uniforms,” Silas said. It was coming up on ten in the morning, and he’d already had three cups of coffee,

fee, but what the hell, Grace had brought him the good stuff from the coffee shop in town. He took a sip of his drink, savoring the unburned flavor.

Grace rolled her eyes at him and sat down in the chair on the other side of his desk. She wore her long grey hair in a ponytail, and today the tips were purple. “Alice get ahold of you again?” he asked with a nod to her hair.

“What can I say, my granddaughter is a brilliant colorist.”

“She’s twelve.”

“Beethoven wrote Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star when he was five.”

“It was Mozart, and he didn’t write it. He composed variations to it when he was in his twenties. I’ll grant you, he was performing for royalty when he was five so I get your point.” Sort of.

“The uniforms finding anything?” Grace asked, gesturing to the map Silas had hung in his office with the key locations—such as where they’d found the body, Flynn’s house, and the Floreses’ house—marked in red.

Silas shook his head. “A couple of other folks heard the gunshot and the revving of the boat. It’s hard to believe someone wouldn’t have seen something though. The trees haven’t lost their foliage yet, but still...”

Grace stood and walked to the map. “It was early and not fully light yet,” she said. He joined her, and together they stared at the image. “But you’re right. It’s quiet enough around the lake this time of year that it’s weird no one saw Flynn on his boat. Unless...”

“What are you thinking?”

“There aren’t many places that are that isolated on the lake. Do you think it was chance or planning that one of them happened to be the place where we found the body?”

“Not willing to lay odds on that yet,” he said. “If the knife wound wasn’t self-inflicted—”

“It wasn’t self-inflicted.”

Sarah, the medical examiner, walked into the office. “And before you ask,” she said raising a hand. “No, I don’t have much more than that. I just came to drop off some donuts for my husband and thought I’d stop by.” Sarah’s husband was the town attorney with offices across the street from the police station.

“No donuts for me?” Silas asked.

“You going to go on that date with my sister when she visits?”

“I was thinking about it, but if you have to bribe people to date her then probably not,” Silas said.

Sarah scowled at him the way only a friend can. “I want her to move up here, and you’re the most eligible bachelor around.”

“Maybe she doesn’t need a man to move. Maybe you could just ask her?”

“Of course she doesn’t *need* a man—or woman, if that’s her preference—to move,” Grace said. “But a good partner can be quite an incentive, if you know what I mean,” Grace said, adding an exaggerated wink in his direction. Silas felt the coffee start to crawl back up, and Sarah grinned at him.

“Do you have anything for us, Sarah? Other than the

fact that the knife wound wasn’t self-inflicted?”

All business now, Sarah nodded. “Not much, though. Given the unusual circumstances, I’m running an extensive blood panel so it takes longer. Based on what was in Flynn’s bathroom, we know we’ll find blood pressure medication in his system and maybe a light sedative, but I should have the full results tonight or tomorrow. No other wounds other than the stab wound which was most likely made with a fishing knife. We found a few scales on the victim’s clothes around the entry point. I have one of the techs seeing if he can get a match to what kind of knife. Other than that, I got nothing.”

Silas thanked her, and with a promise to call him as soon as she had anything, Sarah left. He and Grace turned back to the map.

“Okay, so Flynn left his house early enough to make it to the Floreses’ by 6:30. Based on Angela’s statements, Flynn left the house at approximately ten minutes to 7:00. The Floreses heard a boat rev at 7:30, which was confirmed by another neighbor. The storm started at 7:55 and ended at about 8:15, and Flynn’s body was found at 8:23. We know it was left on the beach *before* the storm, so sometime between when he left the Floreses’ at ten minutes to 7:00 and 7:55, we know that Flynn picked someone else up, was murdered, his body brought ashore, and his boat disappeared.”

“That’s a lot to accomplish in fifty-five minutes.”

“Not if it was planned,” Silas said, hoping he was wrong and that they didn’t have a cold-blooded killer in

their town.



“Chief, Angus McCreary is here to see you,” Deputy Derek Hassel said from the doorway.

Silas gestured for Hassel to let Angus in. He’d been staring at the map again after returning from a few hours with the uniforms knocking on doors, and he could use a little distraction.

“What can I do for you, Angus?” Silas said, turning to face the older gentlemen as he came through the door carrying a mud-caked shotgun. Angus was a big, grizzly bear of a man, but his appearance was always clean, and the gun in his hand looked out of place.

“It ain’t mine, but I found it in my field. Thought I should turn it in,” he said, holding the weapon out.

Silas eyed it, wondering why his deputy hadn’t handled the situation. With a sigh, he reached for the filthy firearm.

“Hassel!” An instant later Derek popped his head back in.

“Yeah, Chief?”

“Take this and clean it enough to run the registration.”

Derek, who’d been handling hunting rifles since the age of three, took it with an ease that once again had Silas wondering why he hadn’t just handled the intake to begin with.

Once Hassel was gone, Silas turned back to Angus. “When’d you find it?”

“Last night. I was doing rounds in my fields, saw the stock sticking up. It was too late to bring it down so I

brought it now.”

“And which field?” Silas asked, gesturing to the map. The items he and Grace had marked were innocuous enough that he didn’t worry about Angus seeing anything he probably didn’t already know.

“This one,” he said, pointing to one of the few cleared pastures on the south end of the lake.

“Thanks,” Silas said. “Any idea whose it might be?”

“Mine.”

“The gun, Angus. Not the field.”

Angus’s bushy brows dropped, and he ran his hand along his greying beard. “My guess, Tommy Perkins. He likes to trespass on my fields ‘cause they’re some of the only areas near his daddy’s place where he can actually pick up speed on that quad bike of his. I’ve had a few words with him on the matter. That bike scares my cows.”

Angus didn’t like anything that upset his cows. From rain storms to quad bikes, he took them all as a personal affront.

“Thanks, Angus. We’ll see if it’s registered and follow up from there. Appreciate you bringing it in.” Silas held out his hand, and the two shook.

Angus was walking out the door when Grace walked in. The two nodded to each other, then once Angus was gone, Grace turned to him in question. Silas told her about the gun, and by the time he’d finished, Hassel was standing at his door with a slip of paper in hand.

“Gun’s registered to Evan Perkins,” the deputy said, handing the slip over.

“Tommy’s dad,” Grace said. “Imagine that. That kid is nothing but trouble.”

“That kid is still a kid,” Silas said. “He’s fourteen, it would be good to remember that.”

“He’s a hoodlum in the making,” she countered. “We gonna go talk to him?” she asked, cutting off any further debate on the topic of Tommy Perkins’s proclivities.

Silas sighed. “Yeah, we’re gonna go talk to him.”



“I didn’t do nuthin!” Tommy Perkins exclaimed even when presented with the now clean shotgun. Sometimes Silas envied the ease with which kids embraced sociopathic tendencies, and he wondered what it would be like to lie with such conviction.

“Tommy.” Evan Perkins’ sharp tone got Tommy’s back up and the boy glared at his father. His father glared right back.

Then just as quickly as his back straightened, Tommy’s shoulders slumped. “Fine, I rode my quad up there the other day and took the gun with me.” He chanced a glance at his father who wisely held his tongue, waiting for the rest of the story.

“I didn’t know it fell off the back of my bike until I got home, and since we were gone yesterday, I didn’t have a chance to go get it. I was gonna go today,” he said.

Evan’s jaw worked, no doubt in a struggle to not lay into his son about taking a gun without asking and without supervision. Instead, he shot Silas a look, clearly asking

him what he wanted to do about it.

“When was the last time you were in the field?” Silas asked.

“Friday afternoon. My dad went into town to get dinner with Aunt Jo, and I stayed home.”

Silas glanced at Evan who nodded.

“But you weren’t up in the field yesterday? Yesterday morning?”

Tommy frowned and shook his head.

“One of our clients ran out of stock and was heading to a big farmers market,” Evan said. “We made an early morning run over to Rhinebeck to drop off a load of our cheeses to her. Left around six in the morning. Got back around 11:00. Stopped at a diner for a late breakfast on the way back. You think Mr. McCreary is going to press trespassing charges?” he asked.

Silas fought a grin. So Evan was going to look to the police to make his point. Couldn’t blame him, really. Tommy wasn’t a hoodlum in the making, but he was definitely more mischievous than most.

Silas shrugged. “Not sure. We’ll have to tell him of course.”

Tommy’s eyes about bugged out of his head.

“He might agree to community service of some sort. Maybe since Tommy seems to think it’s okay to handle guns on his own, we can work something out for him to clean all our tactical gear,” Silas suggested.

Tommy groaned.

“If you’re going to handle guns, you’re going to have

to learn to take care of them,” Evan said. “If Mr. McCreary agrees, I think that would be a fine punishment.”

Silas nodded. “I’ll ask him and let you know.”

Evan inclined his head, and he and Grace turned to walk back to their vehicle.

“Evan,” Silas said, turning back. “What’s the range on this shotgun?” he asked holding the gun up. He wasn’t sure it was evidence, but he was going to hold onto it until he was certain.

Evan cocked his head. “Depends. If it’s just shot, it’s the usual thirty to forty yards, but it’ll take a sabot as well which will give it a range of two to three times that.”

Silas’s gaze drifted to the boy who was shifting from foot to foot.

“Tommy?” Evan demanded. “Tell me you didn’t take a loaded gun out for a joy ride.”

Silas almost cringed at the raw horror he heard in Evan’s voice—it was one thing to take a gun, it was quite another to load it first.

“Guns don’t do much good if they aren’t loaded,” Tommy muttered.

“For the love of all that is holy,” Evan said on an exhale. “Whatever punishment Mr. McCreary agrees to for you trespassing on his property is nothing compared to what I will rain down on you, son.”

Silas and Grace slipped away, trusting Evan to handle his son. Navigating their car down the dirt driveway, Silas paused when they reached the end. If he turned left, the road would take them back to town. If he turned right, it

would take them back to the beach where Truman Flynn’s body had been found.

He hesitated for a moment, then turned right.



Standing on the empty beach where they’d found Truman Flynn did not bring any additional inspiration. Silas glanced to this left, toward Angus McCreary’s field. He knew it was possible that the gun Tommy had dropped could have been the one Judy Flynn had heard, but since Tommy hadn’t been the one to fire it, the possibility didn’t really get them any further in the investigation. He just hoped that when Hassel had cleaned the mud off it earlier that he’d done it gently enough to not completely destroy any prints that might have been left.

“Anything speaking to you?” Grace asked from where she sat on a log at the top of the beach.

“No,” he bit out. “Nothing is speaking to me.”

“Then maybe we can go back? It’s getting cold out here.”

He was about to concede her point when something on the water caught his attention. He squinted. Could it be?

“You got a pair of binoculars?” he asked, not taking his eyes from the water.

A few seconds later, he heard Grace’s footsteps come up behind him. “See something?” she asked, handing a small pair over.

He raised them to his eyes, focused, then scanned the area.

“Well?” she asked.

“Yeah,” he said. “I see something. There’s a seat pad floating out there about thirty feet beyond the dock. I think we just found the boat, and I think we’re gonna need some divers.”



There would be no coffee from the good coffee shop this morning, Silas knew that much was true. He’d kept his team up much later than usual, and of the myriad of passive aggressive ways Grace would show her discontent, not bringing coffee would be top on her list.

“Chief?” Hassel stuck his head into the office. “There’s someone here to see you.”

“They aren’t dropping off a found wallet or poodle or anything like that are they?” Silas drawled, tapping a pen on his desk.

Derek flushed and shook his head. “No, sir. He says his name is Jimmy Stevens. Says he’s related to Truman Flynn.”

Silas stared at Hassel willing the young man to see—or even just catch a glimpse—of the real world. They hadn’t yet received the particulars of the retired actor’s estate, but after the preliminary background check had come in the night before, he—and everyone on the force—knew that Flynn didn’t have any immediate family to leave it to. Of course that wouldn’t stop everyone and their grandmother from crawling out of the woodwork to get their hands on Truman’s fortune.

“Uh, I think you should meet with him Chief. He says he saw Mr. Flynn the morning he died?”

Silas wished he had the optimism Derek had, but maybe Jimmy Stevens *did* have something interesting to say. “Send him in,” he said, tossing the pen on the desk.

Hassel gave a relieved nod and left, returning less than a minute later with a tall, clean cut man in his early to mid-twenties. The man’s dark hair was trimmed close, his jaw was clean shaven, and his clothes—a rather unique burgundy tracksuit—were clean.

“Have a seat, Mr. Stevens. What can I do for you?” Silas asked, gesturing to a chair.

“Call me Jimmy,” he said as he adjusted his phone in his pocket and sat. “I’m Truman’s grandson.” Jimmy’s eyes met and held Silas’s.

“He doesn’t have any children listed as his next of kin,” Silas said.

“He didn’t know about me until I came to town. He and my grandmother had a thing back in the day. She never told him about the daughter she had, my mother, and she never told him about me.”

“So what brought you to town now?”

Jimmy shrugged and looked away. “My grandma died four weeks ago. I was helping my mom go through her things. She did some pretty cool stuff back when she was my age, you know, in the film industry and stuff?”

Silas had no idea what the man was talking about, but Jimmy seemed to be waiting for a reaction so he nodded.

“When did you get into town?”

“I don’t know, four days ago?”

Silas fought the urge to sigh. “Which was it, you don’t know or four days ago?”

Jimmy’s eyes narrowed but he pulled out his phone and punched in a few things. He scrolled through something until he found what he wanted, then he held the device up. “Five days ago,” he said.

“That your calendar?”

Jimmy let out one of those half-laugh-half-‘dealing with old people’-snorts and shook his head. “My Instagram. I posted when I got here.”

“So you came to meet your grandad. And did you?”

“Yeah, I told your deputy I did. I saw him the day after I arrived and then the morning before he died.”

Silas glanced at the calendar on his desk. “It’s been two days since he died and you’re just now coming in to talk to us?”

Jimmy shifted in his seat. “I didn’t hear anything until the night after he died and by then it was too late to come in. I wanted to come yesterday, but I stopped at a diner for breakfast and must have had some bad baked beans or sausages. I got sick. Like so sick, you definitely wouldn’t have wanted to see me.”

Silas eyed the young man and wondered just where the concept of civic duty had gone. Everyone had a phone these days, hell, even his seven-year-old niece had a phone. And Jimmy had even just *shown* his phone to Silas. Would it have been so hard to pick it up and dial?

Thinking the answer to that question would leave him

even more disenchanted, Silas decided not to ask and to return to the reason for Jimmy’s visit. “So tell me about the last time you saw Mr. Flynn. And I’m assuming this isn’t a confession because if it is, I should get another deputy in here.”

“Oh no, no, no, no. I didn’t kill him,” Jimmy said, pressing himself back into the chair as if to get away from the accusation.

“Of course not,” Silas said, though that remained to be seen. “So why don’t you just tell me what happened?”

Jimmy eyed him for a moment then seemed to accept that he wasn’t being accused of murder, and he slumped down in his seat. “He wanted to take me fishing. I walked down to the dock outside of town, and he picked me up at about 7:00, maybe a little after. We trolled around a bit, cast our lines—at least I think that’s what he called it—and even caught some fish. He tried to teach me how to clean it, but that wasn’t really my thing, so he tossed them into a cooler and said he’d do it later. We’d just come around some point when he realized the boat was taking on water.

“He couldn’t figure out where it was coming from, and it wasn’t dire or anything, but he said he wanted to get the boat back to his boathouse to check it out. We were about a mile down lake from town, so I told him to just drop me off, and I would walk home.”

“And did you?”

Jimmy nodded. “I think he dropped me off around 7:30 or so.”

“You didn’t post about it,” Silas said gesturing to the

phone Jimmy still had.

“No, I didn’t post about it.” Jimmy rolled his eyes.

“You must have gotten caught in the storm on your way home?”

“I did. Ruined my favorite pair of sneakers.”

“Sorry to hear that.” Silas stared.

“I mean, it’s nothing compared to what happened to my grandpa or anything,” Jimmy was quick to add. “But I didn’t know about that when I got back to my room. I just knew my shoes were ruined, and I was annoyed.”

“And what have you heard about his death?”

Again, Jimmy shrugged. “Nothing other than he died, and you all are investigating it. I assume that means you think there was foul play involved? Do you know how he died?”

Silas studied Jimmy for a long moment before answering. “Not yet,” he eventually said. “We expect to know today. The ME was running a full tox screen, and that takes time. We want those results before we come to any conclusions.”

“You think he was poisoned?” Jimmy frowned.

“What I think,” Silas said, “Is that we need to wait for the tox screens to have a full picture of just what happened to Truman Flynn.”

Taking the hint, Jimmy nodded and stood. “I’m staying at the Lakeside Inn—room 423. Here’s my number in case you need to reach me.” He reached for a post-it on Silas’s desk, grabbed a pen, then scribbled down a number. “I’d like to know what happened to him.”

Silas gave a half-hearted nod and rose to shake the young man’s hand. He wasn’t sure if he believed Jimmy Stevens, but he did have manners.

An hour later, he was still in his office. He’d moved from his desk to stand before the map, and in his hand he held Evan Perkins’s shotgun. The same shotgun Hassel had cleaned so well that the only prints they’d been able to pull were Hassel’s and Silas’s.

“So we have at least three sets of suspects,” Grace said, entering his office carrying a cup of coffee. Evidently, she’d forgiven him when he’d updated her on Jimmy Stevens.

He took the cup gratefully, and the smell of it alone made him want to kick everyone out of the station so he could savor it in the peace it deserved. Instead, he spoke to Grace. “At least three suspects. Judy Flynn controls the money, maybe she thought the investment with the Floreses was a bad idea but he wouldn’t listen?”

“And then there’s the Floreses themselves. Based on the financial information we subpoenaed yesterday, if Flynn pulled out, they’d lose the deal.”

“And then last, but certainly not least, we have the arrival of the heretofore unknown grandson, Jimmy Stevens. I wonder if Flynn was going to require a DNA test?” he asked idly.

Before Grace had a chance to weigh in, Silas’s phone rang, and Sarah’s name flashed up on the screen. He held the device up for Grace to see, then answered the call. As Sarah spoke, he let his eyes travel over the shotgun he still held in his hand. His gaze caught on a scratch by the trig-

ger, and his attention drifted from what Sarah was telling him to what he was seeing. But then Sarah said something that jerked him back to their conversation, and he asked her to repeat it. When she did, he smiled.

“Thanks, Sarah,” he said, his eyes going to Grace even as he asked Sarah, “How do you feel about making a little trip to the point? I think I know exactly what happened.”



Despite living the farthest from the police station, the Floreses were the first to arrive. In carefully understated clothing, they took two of the four seats Silas had arranged across from his desk. Beyond greeting him and Grace, they said very little.

Next to arrive was Judy Flynn. Her gaze caught and paused on the Floreses, she frowned for a moment, then turned her attention to Silas who gestured her to one of the remaining seats.

Jimmy arrived last, and much like Judy, he paused in the door and scanned the room. As far as Silas knew, the young man knew neither the Floreses nor Judy and so was likely confused as to who they were. Even so, he followed Silas’s direction and took the last seat.

When all four sets of eyes were focused on him, he rose from his seat, and Grace, carrying the shotgun, came to stand beside him.

“I’m sure you are all wondering why I’ve called you in. You’re probably assuming that we know how Truman Flynn was killed, and if so, you’d be correct. We do. But

first I want to clear a few things up.”

He paused—yes, it was dramatic, but policing in his small town had to have its small entertainments. Everyone cast suspicious glances at each other, then when they refocused their attention on him, he continued.

“This shotgun,” he said, holding it up. “Judy Flynn heard it go off just before 7:30 in the morning. She was right in that it wasn’t a hunter who fired it. In fact, it wasn’t a human at all.”

Silas wasn’t too proud to admit to feeling just a little satisfied at the looks of confusion on everyone’s faces. He continued, “This gun fell off the back of a bike the night before Flynn was murdered and landed in a field not far from where the body was ultimately found.”

“If someone didn’t fire it, how did it go off?” Jimmy asked.

“Believe it or not, a cow stepped on it.”

“A cow?” Judy said.

Silas nodded. “If you look closely, you can see the scratches caused by the hoof.” He held it out, and in sync, all four of them leaned forward.

“Oh, I see it, right there,” Charles said, pointing.

“Exactly,” Silas said, and they all sat back.

“So if the gun didn’t have anything to do with my uncle’s murder, why mention it?” Judy asked.

Silas handed the shotgun to Grace. “I didn’t say it didn’t have anything to do with his murder, I just said it wasn’t the cause of death.”

“Then how was it involved?” she pressed.

“Before we get to that, I’d like to address the fact that by the time the shot went off, Flynn’s boat was *already* taking on water. Isn’t that right, Jimmy?”

Jimmy nodded.

“And Charles, what would you know about that?” Silas asked, turning his attention to the businessman.

Charles sat back in his chair. “Me? Nothing. Why would you think I’d know anything about that?”

“You can relax, Mr. Flores. Your tampering with Flynn’s boat didn’t kill him either. At most, we’d only charge you with destruction of property, and we may not even do that if you tell us the truth.”

Charles eyed Silas, and beside him, his wife reached for his hand and squeezed it.

“You said it didn’t have anything to do with his death?” Charles asked.

“I can confirm it had nothing to do with his death,” Silas answered.

Charles exhaled. “It was stupid, I know. But he was backing out of the deal we’d been discussing and if he did that, we wouldn’t be able to move forward. He’d told us that morning that he wanted out. I was angry and took a kampilan to his boat. Just one swing before I came to my senses. I was even going to confess to him, but I took the long way back to the house to cool my temper, and by the time I got back, he was already gone.”

“So if he didn’t drown, and he wasn’t shot, what happened?” Judy demanded. “I heard there was a stab wound, was he killed with a knife?”

Both Charles and Kathy gasped at the mention of a knife, and Silas wondered where Judy had heard that. He’d been intentionally vague with everyone, but still, in a small town, it was hard to keep secrets.

“He did have a knife wound when we found him but again, we can confirm it had nothing to do with his death.”

“Really?” Jimmy asked, sitting forward in his seat. “Nothing to do with his death?”

“Other than to be a red herring, no, the knife wound was not the cause of your grandfather’s death.”

“Oh my god, thank god,” he said, then slumped back in his chair and closed his eyes. Silence stretched in the room, and slowly Jimmy opened his eyes and looked at each person in the room, ending with Silas.

“Care to tell us what you know?” Silas prompted.

“I know I lied to you earlier today, it’s just that, well, I thought I might have killed him, and it was an accident, really it was, but I didn’t know what to do,” he said.

Silas waved off his confession. “Why don’t you tell us now?”

Jimmy took a deep breath and let his gaze drop as he remembered. “I don’t actually know what happened. You’re right in that the boat was taking on water, but not a lot. We were still enjoying the morning on the lake, and Truman didn’t seem too concerned about it. He was teaching me how to clean a fish, and we were laughing about it. I wasn’t lying when I said it wasn’t really my thing, but I was giving it a try.

“Then suddenly we heard the shot, and it felt like it hit

the boat. I've seen enough shows to know that when bullets start flying the best thing to do is to get low," he paused and frowned. "Or I guess I don't really *know* that, but it's what they do on all the shows, and that's what I did, I dropped to the bottom of the boat. The next thing I knew, Truman was on top of me. It wouldn't have been such a big deal if I hadn't..." Jimmy paused then cleared his throat and continued. "It wouldn't have been such a big deal if I hadn't still been holding the knife. He fell on it, I swear. It was just an accident!" he said.

"I know," Silas reassured him. "But tell us what happened next."

Jimmy studied him for a moment then continued. "I didn't know what to do, but there was blood everywhere, and I knew I had to do something. I got up and looked around, hoping to find someone to help but when I didn't see anyone, I knew I'd have to figure it out on my own. I spotted the dock not far away and somehow managed to get the boat started. I gunned it, thinking that I'd call the police as soon as I got there so they could come help."

Jimmy shook his head even as he finished his story. "I all but rammed into the dock and didn't bother to tie the boat up. I just grabbed Truman and carried him to the beach. But by the time I got there, it was clear he was dead, and I, well, I panicked. Who would be the first suspect? Of course it would be the heretofore unknown grandson that everyone would assume just wanted a piece of the old man's estate.

"And so I left him. The boat drifted away, but there was

a lot of water—and blood—in it anyway, so it never even crossed my mind to try and take it back across the lake to town. I just ended up walking. It wasn't far, maybe three miles or so. The storm washed most of the blood off me."

Jimmy's voice had grown more distant as he talked, and Silas hoped that the young man's generation didn't have as many hang-ups about therapy as his own did. It was a hell of a thing to see a man die.

"So if the stab wound didn't kill him, and it wasn't the shot, or the leaking boat, what was it?" Kathy asked.

Silas turned to Judy. "Care to enlighten us, Ms. Flynn?"

"About what?"

"Hyperkalemia," Silas said.

"Hyper-what?" Charles interjected.

"Kalemia," Silas finished. "It's unusually high levels of potassium in a person's blood. When high enough, it can weaken the heart and eventually lead to heart failure."

"She was poisoning him?" Jimmy demanded, looking at the woman in horror.

"She was," Silas confirmed. "The potassium levels in Truman's system were far above the toxic level. In fact, his levels were so high that it could only have happened through a combination of medication—the blood pressure meds Mr. Flynn was taking—and a continual supply of the element itself. By the way, Ms. Flynn, we have a team at the house looking for the additive. I suspect we'll find it in a salt substitute you fed your uncle, won't we?"

"Salt substitute?" Charles asked.

"Why would you think that?" Judy asked at the same

time.

“Salt substitute is easy to get and exceedingly high in potassium,” Silas said.

Jimmy sat forward and scratched his temple. “So are you saying that Truman had a heart attack because his niece was poisoning him, and *that’s* why he collapsed on top of me? I know you said the gunshot didn’t have anything to do with his death, but is it possible the fright might have induced the heart attack she was predisposing him to?”

Silas bobbed his head. “It’s possible, but we likely won’t ever know for sure. All we do know is that with the potassium levels he had in his system, his body was a ticking time bomb. But what I’d like to know is why. Why did you do it, Ms. Flynn? You’ve lived with your uncle for fifteen years, what happened to lead you to this *now*?”

Judy tightened her grip on her purse and sniffed. “He was having an affair. With her,” she said with a jerk of her head in Kathy’s direction.

Both Kathy and Charles opened their mouths, no doubt to protest, but Silas cut them off with a gesture.

“Surely he’d had them before?” Silas said, though it didn’t really bear thinking about an eighty-seven-year-old man engaging in such activities.

Judy’s head jerked. “He had, and when he did, he always asked me to leave for a few weeks so he could have some privacy. It wasn’t bad. I’d go visit my mother, or go to New York City. He always paid for it, of course.”

“But this time was different?” Silas prompted.

Judy blinked the same rapid series of three blinks.

“It was,” she said, then raised her eyes to meet his gaze. “He told me about Jimmy, and I knew he liked the idea of having a grandson. It doesn’t take a genius to figure out that if Jimmy proved to be who he said he was, that my uncle would write him into the will.”

“But surely there was enough to go around?” Silas asked.

“Normally yes, but he was also talking to the local university about funding a film program. Nearly all of his assets would go to the project.”

“And you were afraid that if he asked you to leave while he was having his affair that you’d lose control of the money, and things would never be the same when you returned,” Silas finished, the pieces of the puzzle falling into place. For a woman like Judy Flynn, consistency and constancy were important, perhaps even vital.

“I’d have had nothing to come back to, Chief Carter,” she said. “Working for my uncle was perfect, we both benefited—he didn’t have to think about anything other than having fun in his retirement, and I had a job and the life I wanted. If he gave it all away, what would become of me? I’d have nothing. Even if I could have found another job, who would hire me?”

Silas didn’t have an answer for the plaintive question, and so instead he called in two of his deputies and had them gently lead Judy Flynn out of his office. They’d read Truman’s niece her Miranda rights and then get her set up in a room where he’d take her official statement. It wasn’t a task he looked forward to—he didn’t condone Judy

Flynn, but he did feel sorry for her, sorry that she'd reached a place in her life where she thought murder was her best option.

Turning back to his remaining guests, he rose and shook Jimmy's hand. The young man fled the room right after, saying that he was planning on going back home as soon as he could find a train out of town. Then Kathy and Charles filed out, being sure to tell him on their way that Kathy had most definitely *not* been having an affair with Truman. Of course Silas already knew this. With his ticking time bomb of a heart, there was no way Truman Flynn could have survived the rigors of an affair. And besides, the Floreses seemed sweetly devoted to each other.

When everyone but Grace was gone, Silas sank back down into his seat and rubbed a hand over his face. "That was a hell of a mess," he muttered.

"Shakespeare was right, what a twisted web we weave," Grace said, taking the seat Judy Flynn had so recently occupied.

"Tangled web we weave, Grace. It's 'oh, what a tangled web we weave,' and it wasn't Shakespeare, it was Sir Walter Scott."

"Smarty pants," she muttered as she leaned back and put her feet up on his desk.

Silas snorted. "A cow and a shotgun, Grace. Who would have thought?"

