



DEATH
AT A
SCOTTISH
WEDDING

« A SCOTTISH ISLE MYSTERY »

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Death at a Scottish Wedding
A SCOTTISH ISLE MYSTERY



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**CROOKED
LANE**

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To Steve, Jeffrey, and Parker: thank you for your support, and for always being there.

Chapter One

As far as I was concerned, October in Scotland might as well have been the Arctic Circle. Venturing outside included heavy boots, a long scarf, fuzzy gloves, a weird hat with ear flaps, and a coat that made me look like a Stay Puft Marshmallow woman.

Why did I pick a white puffy one?

If it weren't for the fact that a delectable shepherd's pie awaited me down at the pub, I would have never left the warmth of the five-hundred-year-old church where I had my medical practice in Sea Isle, Scotland.

I slid more than walked down the small hill and around the corner to the pub, which was—closed.

“What?”

There was a sign on the door: “Closed for a Holiday.”

It was October. The Scots liked their holidays, but had I missed one? I'd so been looking forward to an early lunch—technically, more a late breakfast. I'd been up early packing and making sure I had my patients covered.

I pulled off a glove, and the icy air whipped around my fingers. I called my friend Mara, who helped her grandparents manage the pub. She lived above the establishment, which was always open this time of day—normally.

The phone rang, but Mara didn't answer.

Great. What if something happened to them? My chest tightened.

They would have called if it were a medical emergency.

After checking the time, I shoved the phone back into my pocket. My friend Jasper's tea shop was closed because he was already at the castle where we were headed later in the day for our friend Angie's wedding.

Jasper was a French-trained pâtissier artist who created the elaborate

wedding cakes for Angie and her fiancé, along with the desserts that went with the many meals and parties before the wedding.

I'd keep trying Mara to find out what was happening.

My stomach growled.

Cheese and crackers for the win.

Since I was leaving town for the four-day event, there wasn't much food in the fridge.

My phone buzzed in my pocket, but by the time I took off my glove and answered, Mara had hung up. I called her back.

"Em?" she asked without saying hello.

We'd become close the last couple of months and had no need for niceties.

"I didn't even knock."

"Security camera," she said.

"I didn't know you'd be closed. I was going to grab some lunch before we left."

"Oh, shoot. I was busy with the breakfast crowd and forgot to text you. There is a blizzard coming. So, Ewan wants to leave early. I shut down the pub an hour ago so I could get ready."

Blizzard? Ewan? That would be Ewan Campbell, laird, mayor, and Constable of Sea Isle, my new home as of three months ago. As the coroner, I worked with him on unusual deaths. Most people in Sea Isle died of two things: old age or drowning at sea. Murders and crime were not common in this quaint little town.

Though they did happen.

Thankfully, there'd only been one murder. While I'd never say it out loud, it had been the most exciting time of my life, and not in a good way. I almost died, twice. As the coroner, I wasn't the most experienced crime solver in the world; most of my knowledge came from the British mysteries I adored.

As a former ER doc, I'd dealt with death, but nothing had prepared me for trying to solve a murder.

I'd been brushing up on crime-scene techniques and reading autopsy procedures just in case something happened again. And I was much better

with the chain of evidence.

Ewan and I were respectful of each other but tended to butt heads if we were together for more than five minutes.

“I thought it was just you and me.”

“Right. About that: Ewan wanted me to go down early with him to oversee the caterers. He says Angie was worried about the food for the hen party tonight, and with the storm coming, they decided to deliver all the food for the four days ahead of time. His housekeeper has it well in hand, but I promised to help where needed.

“Of course, I couldn’t say no. It’s Angie’s wedding. Ewan said he’d drive us down. He’s picking us up in fifteen minutes.”

“Oh.” Not only would I be in the car with Ewan, but I’d also be starving. Okay, maybe not starving, but definitely hungry.

“Why is the pub closed?”

“The grans left for holiday in Spain last night, remember? They’ll be back for the wedding.”

“Right.” I’d forgotten they’d be gone.

“I’m bringing a basket full of food—you won’t go hungry.”

I grinned. “It’s like you know me or something.”

She laughed and then hung up.

I almost always had a patient show up at the practice, even when we were closed on the weekends. More than once over the last few months, I’d worked a few thirteen- and fourteen-hour days. Though, most of the time, it wasn’t that bad.

The pace of life in Sea Isle was so much different from Seattle and my life as an ER doctor there. I still had many things to learn about Scotland, but so far, I loved the people and the place.

Not so much the weather.

As I arrived, Ewan’s Range Rover pulled up in front of the church.

“Out for a walk?” He seemed serious about the question. The weather didn’t seem to bother those who were native to Scotland.

“Uh. Yes. I’ll grab my bag.”

He followed me into reception and then to the office, where I’d left my small suitcase. My dress for the wedding hung separately on the back of the

door.

Ewan frowned as he took the case and the dress from my hands. He was a handsome man and reminded me of those guys in the Old Spice commercials. He always smelled of pine and looked fine in his dark jeans and a navy cable-knit sweater.

He'd helped me out of a bind when a killer had been after me, but for the most part, our relationship was just as awkward as the first day we'd met.

"What?" I asked.

"Is this all you have? We'll be gone four days."

"Yes. I always pack light. Oh, except for"—I jogged around my desk—"can't forget this." I held up my medical bag. "Maybe, since the weather is bad, we should take this as well."

I rolled the new lab case out. Abigail, a wonder of a woman, put the medical trolley together for when we had to do home visits. A few of our machines that we used often were made in a travel size, as well as other equipment, supplies, and meds. It saved a great deal of time if we could make diagnoses on site or if we were in an emergency off-site.

"Hopefully, you won't need it." He smirked.

"You probably just jinxed us." I smirked back.

By the time he loaded my stuff in the car and settled in the driver's seat, the snow fell in heavy sheets.

The SUV slid a bit as we headed down to the pub.

"Is it safe to drive?"

"Aye. No worries."

Mara waited outside the pub, with two huge suitcases and a tote bag. She sat in the back seat, even though I'd offered her the front one.

They bantered back and forth, as he loaded her bags. She had an easier time talking to Ewan than I did.

Everyone in town adored him, and it was mutual as far as I could tell. I had no idea why we were so uncomfortable with each other.

Once on the road, she passed out hearty roast beef sandwiches, chips, brownies, and water cartons.

"Did you hear about the latest drama?" she asked Ewan.

"The one about her dress being stuck in Italy or that the groom's brother

is in jail again?” he said.

Angie, the bride, and I had become fast friends. She ran her family’s tartan company and was incredibly successful. A month ago, Angie had begged Mara and me to come for the four days of festivities for the wedding. She needed moral support.

Mara and I had been privy to a great deal of the behind-the-scenes action for the wedding because poor Angie needed shoulders to lean on that weren’t related to the family.

“The brother,” Mara said. “They aren’t sure his bail arraignment will be in time for the wedding. Angie texted me late last night, and Damien is furious with him.”

“Why is he in jail?” I asked.

Ewan glanced at Mara in the rearview.

“Well, from what I heard, Mr. Carthage, Angie’s soon-to-be father-in-law, has a load of lawyers in Edinburgh just for Caleb,” she said. “He’s either in trouble for brawling, drugs, or gambling. Which one, Ewan?”

“I’m law enforcement and—”

“It’s an ongoing case,” I said.

His eyes opened wide.

“Sometimes I pay attention,” I joked.

He didn’t laugh. I blamed it on the Scottish sense of humor. At times my sarcasm went over well. Other times I was met with blank stares.

It wasn’t long before we turned off the coastal highway onto a road heading up into the highlands. The snow fell heavier as we climbed the narrow road, but plows had already cleared the way.

Ten minutes later, we reached an iron gate with intricately carved gargoyles on each side. No wonder Angie had picked this castle for her gothic-themed wedding.

Ewan pushed a button above his head. The gates opened slowly, and he drove through. Snow dusted the trees lining the driveway, and a soft glow of orange and purple lights wrapping the bare branches gave the place a fairy-tale ambiance.

“Are there Christmas lights in the trees?” I asked.

Ewan smiled. “Yes. Angie wanted white, orange, and purple lights to

incorporate her theme. They are on a computer program so we can change the colors for the holidays. We rent the place out for parties and events when my family isn't using it."

I'd heard about Morrigan Castle from Angie, but nothing could have prepared me for the real thing.

The tree line stopped. Through the snow an enormous castle came into view. Angie had said this was one of the smaller homes Ewan's family owned.

Smaller?

It was at least three stories high and stretched out to the left and right far beyond what we could see.

"It's a castle," I said.

Did I say that out loud?

Ewan smiled, and Mara cackled from the back seat.

"I mean—Angie said—never mind."

"What did Angie say?" Ewan asked.

"That it was small. But it's huge. How many rooms are there?"

Ewan rubbed the bridge of his nose. "Last count was eighty-one. Wait. We redid the observatory on the third floor and the last ten bedrooms on the east wing. Maybe that's ninety-four or so."

This time I laughed. "When you have a house so big you can't count all the rooms, that's crazy."

He nodded. "I agree. I'm working to restore our family homes to preserve their history, but we aren't the only ones who enjoy them. It's why we host events, to help offset the cost of restoration."

"But you have one bigger than this?"

"Yes, but it's going through a full remodel in Glasgow, and there's one on my mother's side that is in Edinburgh. There's a rich history on that side ... I'd be happy to show you sometime."

"That would be great." I realized what I'd said. Why would he offer that? Most of the time we could barely stand to be in the same room.

"We'll plan it soon." He smiled as if it might be something he looked forward to, which I didn't understand. Two people could not be more different, or more awkward, than we were with each other.

I considered myself a relatively worldly person, but Ewan and I ran in different circles. I was an orphan of sorts. It was one of the reasons I'd left my life as an ER doctor for a new adventure in Scotland. I had history here—at least my ancestors did. Though, thanks to my busy schedule, I hadn't been able to research them as much as I would have liked.

One thing I knew for certain—no one in my family had a castle.

Ewan had at least three of them, and a familial history that seemed to cover the whole of Scotland.

Some men ran out from the entrance to help Ewan with the bags.

"I love this place," Mara interjected. "Look at those massive gargoyles over the door."

"Those were care of one of the French women who married into the family five hundred years ago," Ewan said. "Her gothic sensibilities are throughout the house."

"You mean castle," she said.

We laughed.

"Aye. But we've worked hard to make the drafty old thing feel a bit more homely."

"I'm guessing that word means something different here."

Ewan had gone around the back to open it for the two men who had come out of the castle.

"What does it mean where you're from?" Mara asked.

"Plain and not very pretty."

"Here it means comfortable."

When I'd moved to this English-speaking country, I'd never imagined there'd be a language barrier, but there was. Many of my patients had thick accents, and even though we spoke the same language, I didn't always understand them.

After the last three months, I was a bit better, but I sometimes needed Abigail to translate what the patients were saying.

The gargoyles over the door stared down out at me menacingly. Every day was a new adventure here.

I glanced at Ewan, and he smiled again.

Scotland was never boring.



Later that night, the hen party was in full swing. I'd been to a few bachelorette parties, but this was next level. Even though there had been a five-course meal for everyone earlier in the evening, there was an elaborate spread of food here now. I'd already eaten my weight in my friend Jasper's macarons.

Giant vases full of flowers were elegantly displayed on every table. China and silver were used, and the room even had mood lighting. There were two or three different games being played at tables spaced around the room.

The furnishings were in shades of blue toile, as were the long curtains hanging high over the windows.

Angie plopped into a chair near me. "Are you having fun? Why are you over here by yourself?" Known for her eccentric outfits, tonight was no exception. She wore a purple top with feathered sleeves, leather pants, and boots. Her hair was pink tonight; it often changed with her mood.

"I was so excited about your wedding, I didn't sleep much. That and I've been playing that high jinks drinking game with Mara and your cousins. My head started to spin."

"Lightweight." She smiled.

"I think I might do a research study into the livers of you Scots. I don't know how you do it."

"Probably has something to do with the scotch killing off all the germs. At least, that's what granddad says. What do you think the men are doing?"

The men had a stag party somewhere in the west wing. I'd been seated by one of the groomsmen at dinner, and I had a feeling she didn't want to know the truth about what they had planned for her fiancé.

"Your guess is as good as mine," I said. "Are you having fun?"

"Aye." She leaned back in the plush chair beside me. "I cannae believe we are here, and it is happening. I dinnae think the day would ever come."

We were in an elegant ballroom, on the other side of the castle, with all of Angie's female relatives and friends. There had been some introductions, but Mara and I decided there were too many new names to learn.

“You picked an amazing place,” I said. “I’ve never seen such a beautiful castle.” Okay, I hadn’t seen many castles, but this had to be one of the best.

“It is. I’m so grateful to Ewan for allowing us to use it. That man is a good one.” She stared at me pointedly.

“What?”

She laughed. “I’ll never understand why you two can’t get along.”

“We get along—for the most part.”

Angie shook her head.

It was way past my bedtime. I’d been planning on sneaking out before Angie sat down.

The noise level rose. Four women were in a corner, pointing fingers at one another.

“I better go break that up,” Angie said. “The steps and mom like to get together and talk about how awful my da is. His new wife is the one with the deer-in-the-headlights look.

“I can’t believe he didn’t make it up before the storm. Typical Da. Now, she’ll have to go through everything without him.”

I’d met most of the women earlier at a cocktail party, but they were eerily similar. They had shoulder-length black hair and petite figures, and they all wore black party dresses and even the same-colored red lipstick. Some had a few more wrinkles than others, which was the only way to tell them apart from the new wife.

Her dad certainly had a type.

My punk rock friend, Angie, whose hair was in a pink updo, didn’t look anything like them—especially her mother.

It was nearing midnight, and the festivities didn’t seem anywhere close to ending. The music was loud, and the heated air stuffy. My head ached a bit, probably from too much prosecco earlier.

Angie was right. I was a lightweight.

While she played peacemaker with her stepmothers, I saw my opportunity to head out. Once I was in the hallway, though, I couldn’t remember which way to turn.

They should have given us maps.

Our room was on the first floor, but there were so many different

hallways.

Earlier, we'd just followed the crowd of women to the hen party. I had no idea how to get back to my room.

I'd taken a few steps backward when I bumped into someone.

"Oh, sorry," I said.

"No worries," the man said. He had a hoodie pulled up and wore a white shirt and black slacks.

"Wait, you're one of the men who helped us with the bags. Can you tell me how to find the Blue Room on the first floor."

He stopped. "Almost there." He coughed. And his arm wrapped around his stomach. "Seven doors down on the left."

"Are you okay?"

"Aye. Thanks."

"I'm a doctor."

His shoulders stiffened. Then he half ran down the hall.

Okay, then.

He'd been right about the room. It was exactly where he said.

Decorated in a Louis XIV style, with intricately carved furniture trimmed in gold leaf and beautiful silk curtains hanging down over the bed, the blue and gold room screamed French elegance. There was nothing homely, no matter which version used, about it.

The king-sized bed was so spacious, Mara and I didn't mind sharing. I sat on the edge of the bed. The headache wouldn't allow sleep. I opened my medical kit and took two acetaminophen tablets.

A walk in some fresh air would help.

I changed out of my navy, A-line dress I'd bought at Lulu's shop in Sea Isle, and put on jeans and a sweater. Lulu was Angie's aunt, but she wasn't here yet. I hoped the snow would stop soon so the rest of the guests could make it in time for the wedding.

The weather had been a hot topic at dinner. Several people claimed it was going to be a storm unlike any Scotland had seen in thirty years. As if she weren't stressed enough, Angie had seen the weather as a mortal enemy. Mara and I convinced her it was just cold rain, which was considered lucky for weddings.

I slid on fuzzy boots and my puffy coat.

I had no plans to go outside, but there was a beautiful year-round garden in the first-floor conservatory. There were heaters for the plants, and it was protected from the whipping snow outside.

Ewan hadn't been prideful, but he had been excited to show us his castle. His enthusiasm had been adorable, and he'd shared stories about the history of how everything came to be here. Including the French woman who shook everything up when she married the laird.

"It's said she still haunts the halls if housekeeping doesn't keep things up," Ewan had said. I didn't believe in ghosts, but this was certainly the right place for them.

Finding the conservatory on my own was another story. There were so many hallways, and finding the one that led to the back of the house was challenging.

Down one of the halls, two men argued.

"I'm working on the problem," Damien, Angie's groom, said to the other man. "You don't need to worry about it."

"I'll go to the authorities if you don't set it right," the other man said. It was the groomsman, Byron, who sat by me at dinner. He'd been perfectly pleasant then, though he'd told me things I didn't want to know about the stag. "You've known for months what he was up to. Why haven't you done anything?"

"Excuse me." I waved. The two men turned toward me. "I'm very lost."

"Doc, is that you?" Damien asked.

"Yes. I'm trying to find the conservatory."

The other man huffed and then walked away.

"It's easy to get lost in here. If you go down to the end of this hall and turn left, you'll find the rotunda where the glass doors are."

"Ah. Thank you," I said. "Is everything okay?"

He frowned. "What do you mean?"

"Byron seemed upset about something."

"Aye, he's fine. Of all the nights, he wanted to talk business. I don't have the head for it. Is Angie having fun?"

When he said her name, his eyes lit up.

I smiled. “She’s having a grand time.”

“I hope the steps are behaving.”

“Don’t worry—she’s keeping them in line. Get back to your party. Thank you for the directions.”

Was he having financial problems?

Not your monkeys—not your circus. That was my motto these days. I desperately tried to stay out of other people’s dramas.

I nearly shouted with joy when I found the rotunda. The heavy glass doors creaked as I opened them into the garden.

The lighted pathways led into the center of the glassed garden. Lanterns hanging from tall polls had been placed throughout to add a soft glow. Snow slid off the dome but beat down at a furious pace. I stood in the middle of a blizzard without any of it touching me.

The gorgeous view was aromatic with an array of blooms. Ewan had said it was his favorite room in the castle, and I understood why.

I’d forgotten my gloves and stuck my hands in my pockets. There were so many flowers they could have made hundreds of garlands for the wedding. I didn’t know many of the names, but there was every color imaginable.

I wish Tommy were here.

Tommy kept the gardens and the buildings on my property in great shape. He and his sister, Abigail, had become family. She ran my office, cleaned my home, and handled most of the lab work for the patients.

Technically, she and Tommy were here. Abigail hadn’t wanted to stay in the castle with so many people. She didn’t think it would be good for her brother, so they were out in one of the carriage houses.

Ewan had been kind enough to provide a staff member to help Abigail with Tommy while she was here. She’d attended the dinner and the first hour of the hen party but had left, claiming she had a headache. She’d probably been worried about Tommy adjusting to new surroundings.

Highly intelligent, he was on the spectrum. Routine was his friend, and Abigail was the best sister he could have dreamed of for himself. She rightly never saw him as a burden. Soon after I met her, she explained that looking after him was one of the great gifts of her life.

Tommy was a lucky young man to have Abigail as a sister.

One thing Ewan and I agreed on, though, was that she deserved to have a life as well.

She'd been a bit nervous about mixing with Angie and Damien's friends, many of whom were part of the who's who of Scotland and England. Some were even royalty, which had been a big deal to Abigail and Mara.

I was still hard at work building Abigail's confidence. We'd shared several meals so I could go over table manners with her, and I'd helped her with some conversation starters.

She needn't have worried. Members of the royal family or not, Angie and Damien's friends and family were a rowdy bunch. Several fights broke out during the cocktails and dinner party. I couldn't imagine what the stag party was like.

Odd that many of the Scots saw the confrontations as perfectly normal. I'd spent most of my life trying to avoid arguing with people. I sometimes wished I had a big family, but after a few hours of all that tension, maybe I was lucky to be alone in the world.

A stone bench had been situated in the middle of roses, and I sat down. While the air in the conservatory was chilly, it was much better than the overheated fog of perfume and desperation at the hen party, where everyone seemed determined to drink until they passed out.

A flash of light washed over the flowers, and I glanced up. One of the towering turrets overhead stood guard on the right side of the conservatory.

A light from the turret flashed again. In the window, a silhouette of a body slid down a window. Someone stood behind the other person. It was difficult to see through the stained glass, but the body slid down out of sight, and the light disappeared.

Was someone in trouble? How had they even gotten up there?

Maybe I'd imagined it. I closed my eyes.

A hand touched my shoulder, and I screamed.

"It's me. It's meeee," Mara said. "I dinnae mean to scare youuu." She slurred her words a bit and swayed beside me. She peered up to see what I'd been looking at and almost fell. She hadn't worn a coat and held her heels in her hands.

"Mara, you shouldn't be out here like that. You need warmth." I

shrugged out of my coat and put it around her bare shoulders. “Give me your shoes—I’ll help you put them on.

“Hurt my toes. You snuck out,” she said. “Supposed to have fun.” She’d been playing the drinking game but had been winning. How had she gotten so drunk so fast?

“Let’s get you back to our room,” I said. Mara wasn’t one to drink too much, but goodness only knew what was in the punch everyone had been downing at the hen party.

She put an arm around my shoulders.

“No. Parrrrty.” She swirled her shoes around, and one of them flew into a flower bed.

“Stay,” I said, positioning her so that she was mostly upright. I carefully tiptoed through the roses and found the errant shoe.

“Okay. Let’s find some water for you.”

I glanced up to the turret again. I needed to find Ewan. He was the only one who knew how to get up there. We’d been warned not to go up because the restoration on the stairwell wasn’t complete.

I was worried someone might have been drunk and fallen and hurt themselves.

I’d been about to open the door to the main house when it whipped open. Mara screamed—and so did I—but I swear it was her fault.

“Are you okay?” Ewan asked. He glanced from Mara to me and surveyed us up and down. It wasn’t a lewd thing—it was more of a “*what have you done to yourself this time?*”

I didn’t blame him. Trouble seemed to find me.

“Parrrrty,” Mara said.

“I need to drop her off, and then I was wondering if you could tell me how to get up to that turret?”

I pointed to the tower on the right.

“No one is allowed up there. It isn’t safe,” Ewan said in his I-am-the-constable voice.

“Yes. I remember your lecture from earlier, but I’m worried someone may have snuck up and is hurt. There were weird lights and shadows.”

He sighed. “I’ll check on it.”

“I need a driiinnk. So thirsty.” Mara whispered.

“Is she okay? She doesn’t get drunk.” Ewan frowned.

“I think the punch at the hen party might have been a little *extra* tonight.”

“Yeah, the same thing is happening at the stag. Everyone is a little *extra*, as you say.”

“I’d like to go with you to the turret. Just in case someone is hurt.”

“Loooo,” Mara said urgently.

We rushed down the hall to our room, half dragging poor Mara.

“You get her to the loo, and I’ll grab some water for her.”

“Thanks.”

I shoved Mara toward the toilet, but she didn’t get sick. She pushed away from me and sat down on the edge of the jetted tub. “Here is good.” Then she slid down the porcelain until her butt hit the fluffy rug. “Good puppy. Good puppy,” she said as she petted the rug. “I’ve always wanted a dog.”

Ewan knocked on the door.

“Come in,” I said.

He closed his eyes and held out several bottles of water.

“She didn’t get sick—but she thinks the rug is a dog.”

He shook his head. “I’ve known her for years, and I’ve never seen her like this. Highly unusual.”

“Weddings don’t always bring out the best in people.”

“Hey, I’m right here,” Mara complained. “I am, right? This isn’t a dream?”

“You are going to be fine.”

He shrugged. “I asked one of the housekeepers to look after her.” A woman followed him in.

“Thank you,” I said. “If you could just make sure Mara drinks as much water as possible before she passes out, I’d be grateful. And maybe grab her a bucket, just in case.”

“No problem, miss,” the woman said.

“I’m sorry to keep you up so late,” I said to her.

“I’m on the night shift,” she said. “’Tis no problem.”

Back in the bedroom, I grabbed my medical bag.

“I could check it out on my own and let you know if there is something

wrong,” Ewan said. He was determined to keep me out of that turret.

“No, if someone is hurt, they may need immediate attention. Let’s go.”

He took the case from me. I followed him down a long hallway, and then he pulled open an old iron door that creaked like something out of a horror movie.

“This should have been locked,” he said.

He bent at the waist to fit through the door. After he was through it, he turned sideways. I didn’t understand what was happening until he gave me the flashlight.

The stairwell was so narrow, a normal-sized person wouldn’t fit, and the heavy stone steps were at least a foot high. Ewan was broad-shouldered and well over six feet.

“You go first. I want to be here in case you fall,” he said.

I started to say something but stopped. Klutz could have been my middle name.

Part of me was angry he knew me so well. As we climbed the steep steps, the creepy tower creaked and moaned as the wind whipped around it.

The stairs curved into the unknown. I took them one at a time, and I was out of breath twelve steps up.

“The cold is sucking the breath right out of me,” I said, although the truth was that I was out of shape.

“It’s a steep climb,” he said kindly.

It took a few minutes, but it felt like we climbed upward for hours.

We came to another door. I had to take a few steps down so Ewan could get past me and open it wide enough for us to get through. He held it for me.

“Watch your step,” he said.

I took three steps in, stubbed my toe on something, and tripped. I landed hard on the heels of my hands and then crashed my elbow into the floor.

“*Oomph.*”

“Are you okay?” Ewan asked.

My flashlight rolled across the floor and stopped.

“I didn’t scream.” I was proud of myself given what I’d tripped over.

“I almost did,” he said. “More because I worried you were about to fly out of one of the windows when you tripped.”

I swallowed hard. “I’m fine. I’m more worried about *him*.”
The eyes of a dead man stared back at me.

Chapter Two

As if I were an old pro at examining dead bodies, I set about recording as much as I could of the body, with only a flashlight and my phone to help me see. I had Ewan hold the torch, as he called it, while I took pictures. Strange thing was, there was no sign of trauma on the body. But it was possible the bruising hadn't formed yet.

"What do you see?" he asked.

"Nothing." I lifted the head to feel for knots or a head injury. Then I checked his eyes. They were extremely red, as well as the lids. Perhaps he had allergies of some sort and had been rubbing them. There was a slight tinge to the eyes, but it could have been the way the light shone down on them.

I examined his hands. His skin was dry, which wasn't unusual here in Scotland, with the cold and wind.

"I swear it's getting darker in here. Is your flashlight going out?"

"Nay," Ewan said. "Storm is blocking the outdoor lights."

I sighed. "I need to get him back to my lab to do a full workup. Do you have any idea who he is?"

He sighed. "If I've met him, I can't place him."

"Isn't he one of the valets? I ran into him in the hall when I left the hen party. At least, I think it was him. He wore a hoodie. We need to call your men and get him to my place."

"Cannae do that I'm afraid. Storm's already blocked the passage. The only way in or out is on a snowmobile, and even that's dangerous right now with the wind. We'll have to make do.

"A few of my men are here for security purposes. Angie's father-in-law

insisted on it. I'll get them to help."

I'd been on my knees, and he reached down to help me stand.

"At the very least, I'll need somewhere with more light, and we'll need to keep the body as cold as possible. Do you have a walk-in freezer?"

"Aye, but it's full of provisions that we'll need to feed everyone." He snapped his finger. "I have an idea. Give me a few minutes."

"First, help me move the body closer to the stairs. If he didn't just drop dead of natural causes—and he's quite young for that—I don't want your men trampling on a possible crime scene. The closer the victim is to the stairs, the less DNA your men will leave all over the crime scene."

I took the feet, and Ewan lifted the man's shoulders. Rigor mortis hadn't set in yet, so he hadn't been there for long. I'd guessed his age to be early thirties, and he was dressed in dark slacks and white shirt. The hoodie was gone. The tread of his boots showed snow, but he didn't wear a coat.

These facts bothered me. If it was the same man, why wouldn't he have at least worn the hoodie I'd seen him in earlier?

The constable never forgot a name or face. And no one would have been let near the castle without being thoroughly vetted through security. So it was odd he didn't know the man.

"Does he maybe work for you?"

"Nay. I know my staff."

"I don't remember seeing him at the cocktail hour or the dinner. Do you?"

He shook his head.

"Then he probably isn't a guest. Did he help us with the luggage earlier?"

"Nay. That was Angus and Mark. They are my housekeeper Elizabeth's boys. Though, this guy and Mark have the same kind of hair."

"Oh." So, it hadn't been the same person. There was no way I could be sure if the man I saw in the hallway had been the victim or Mark.

Without my equipment at home, I had no idea how to do an autopsy. But I'd figure it out.

"Tell me exactly what you saw tonight." We'd left the man there, and Ewan led me down the stairs.

“Through the heavy snow there was a light in the window. For a split second, I saw the silhouette of someone against the window, with another person behind them. At least, I think that’s what I saw. Everything happened quickly, and the snow didn’t help.”

“I’m assuming you want to do the autopsy tonight?”

I nodded. “Yes. I won’t be able to do a full run of tests, but hopefully I can get an initial idea of the cause of death. I didn’t see much outward evidence of a struggle, but the smell of sick was everywhere.

“I have my medical bag and the travel kit, but I may have to trouble you for other tools. I’ll need help sterilizing and such. I don’t want to bother her, but I’ll need Abigail’s help.”

“I’ll send someone to get her and to watch Tommy.”

“Thank you, Ewan, for looking out for them.”

“What do you mean?”

“Just that you—I mean, with Tommy’s needs—just thanks.”

“No need to thank me. Tommy is like a little brother to me, and Abigail, a sister. I’ll always be looking out after them.”

Ewan the enigma. He was fiercely loyal to those he cared about, which was the entire town of Sea Isle. Although he had incredible wealth, he worked as hard as any day laborer when it came to helping his fellow townspeople.

He was a good man. I had no idea why we had so much trouble getting along.

“I’ll take your bag, and you grab the away kit. Give me half an hour to get things sorted. I’ll send someone to your room when we’re ready.”

“Please tell them to wear gloves when they carry him down. I have a box in my kit if you need them. I wish we had our suits.”

“I have suits in the back of my Rover,” he said. “I keep a kit ready in there as well.”

“Good. We won’t be able to test DNA here, but at least we can collect it.”

“Aye. The trick will be finding men sober enough to help. I’ve given everyone but Henry the night off.”

I chuckled. “Good luck with that.”

He took off, and I entered the room just in time to hear Mara moan.

“I’m never drinking again.”

There was a small laugh coming from the bathroom. The door was open, so I walked in.

Mara sat in an empty tub, fully clothed, holding a bucket. The housekeeper sat on the side of the tub with a washcloth she placed on Mara’s head. “You must be freezing,” the woman said. “I’ll get you a blanket.”

“I’m an idjit, as grandad likes to say.”

She was so pale she matched the porcelain of the large tub.

“You’re many things my friend, but stupid isn’t one of them.”

Mara scrunched her face. “What was in those drinks? I had maybe three.”

“I felt the effects after one,” I said. “I’m pretty sure it was spiked big-time.”

“I work in a pub. You’d think I could handle my liquor. I’m so embarrassed.”

I shrugged. “Don’t be. I can give you something for the nausea, but it’s probably best to let things happen naturally.”

“I don’t think there’s anything left,” she said. “I’m sobering up though, and it sucks.”

I smiled. “I have an idea.”

I took one of the bottles of water the housekeeper had brought in, and then went to open my medical bag. I kept several packets of hydration mix in it for hikers and others who sometimes were lost in the Highlands. Dehydration was one of the main things they faced—that and hyperthermia. Even in the fall, the Highlands was a frigid place.

After putting the packet in, I handed Mara the bottle.

“Drink this. I can’t promise you won’t have a hangover, but it will help put necessary electrolytes back in your body.”

She took a sip. “This is good.”

The housekeeper came back in with a fluffy blanket. “Miss, are you sure you wouldn’t be more comfortable in bed?”

“I’m not risking messing up Ewan’s fancy bedsheets. I’m happy here, thanks.”

I grinned. “Look after her, please. I’ll be back to check on you in a little while.”

“Where are you going?” Mara asked.

I glanced from her to the housekeeper. “I—uh ...” My brain froze.

“Oh no. I know that look. Someone died. Who is it?”

The housekeeper gasped.

Crud. Mara knew me a little too well.

“There was an incident that needs further investigation.”

Mara waved a hand. “Don’t give me all that. Who is it?”

I sighed. “I honestly don’t know. I promise to tell you what I can after the autopsy.”

“Autopsy?” Mara and the housekeeper said at the same time.

There was a knock at the door.

“That will be Ewan or one of his men. I’ve got to go.”

“But ...” Mara’s voice trailed off as I hurried out of the bathroom.

Trusting Mara not to say anything to anyone was easy, but the housekeeper—that I wasn’t so certain about.

“Hi, Doc,” Henry, one of the officers who worked with Ewan, said. “Boss told me to come get you. They’ve got just about everything set up. Abigail’s there telling everybody what to do.”

I grinned. The shy mouse of a girl I’d first met had turned into a force of nature, with a bit of encouragement. Well, when it came to medical emergencies. Socially, not so much.

At the practice, she was game for anything. She soaked up knowledge like a sponge. I’d never met anyone like her, so eager to learn.

We were about to test ourselves by going old school with this autopsy.

I followed Henry to an iron door, much like the one leading up to the tower where we’d found the body. This one opened easily, but the stairs went down rather than up, and they weren’t quite as steep.

“Where are we going?”

“Dungeon,” he said.

I shivered, and it wasn’t from the cold. I’d half expected torches on the walls, but the stairwell was well lit. Like the ones in the turret, the stairs curved in a spiral, and I found myself trailing my fingers along the wall to

steady myself.

Henry carried the heavy travel kit easily. He wasn't quite as tall as Ewan, but he was close—and just as muscular.

When we finally reached the end, we stepped into a room filled with wine—rows of bottles as far as the eye could see.

“You could have said ‘wine cellar.’”

“Aye, but more fun to say ‘dungeon,’” Henry joked. He was in his twenties and one of my favorite people Ewan worked with, so I let it go.

As we rounded a corner, there were glass fridges with what I assumed were bottles of champagne behind their doors. This place had to have cost millions, even before the wine was added, and it went on and on.

Finally, there were some bright lights at the end of one of the rows.

“Here we are,” Henry said.

“Hey, Doc,” Abigail said. She was covered from head to toe in a hazmat suit, and she pointed to another one hanging near a sheet.

“I'm glad you're here,” I said. “I'm sorry if they woke you up.”

She gave me a sweet smile. “I'd been studying.”

That didn't surprise me. Any moment when she sat still, she'd been doing exactly that.

I took in the area. In typical Abigail fashion, she'd created an autopsy room out of nothing.

They'd wrapped a small area with sheets and what looked like shower curtains. A steel table, covered in plastic, held the body. Outdoor spotlights had been positioned around the room, providing plenty of light to see what we were doing.

Abigail held up a pair of tweezers. “I've been gathering evidence off his clothing,” she said. “Ewan will be back in a minute with evidence bags one of his guys had in their truck.”

“Do they have any idea who he is?” I asked. I pulled my hair into a short ponytail to keep it out of my face, and covered up with the suit.

“Not yet,” Henry said. “I'm about to head upstairs with a photo Abigail took to see if we can identify him. We didn't find any ID, but we're certain he's not one of the guests or an employee.”

“That's odd. Is there a guest list? Maybe someone should double-check.”

“Aye, with photos,” Henry said. “He’s not a matchup for any of them, or their plus ones. The old crank insisted on DEFCON twenty-five for this wedding.”

“Dunnae exaggerate, Henry,” Abigail chastised. “By ‘old crank,’ he means Mr. Carthage, Damien’s father.”

“Okay, so we have a mystery man. Henry, can you make sure the tower is cordoned off? I don’t want anyone disturbing the scene until we can get up there in daylight.”

“Yes, mum.” He took off, but not before smiling at Abigail. I don’t think she noticed.

Ever since the fall festival in Sea Isle, which was an all-weekend affair with food, dancing, and Scottish games, Henry had been showing up at my office with treats. He was teaching himself to bake, and said the cakes and cookies were for all of us.

He always made a point of saying hello to Abigail and Tommy. Like Ewan, he seemed genuinely fond of Tommy, and they could talk about gaming for far longer than I had patience to listen.

“Rigor mortis has just started to set in, so maybe two hours from time of death.” Abigail lifted his hand and used a pair of clippers to cut the tips of his nails into a plastic bag. She zipped it closed and used a black marker to label it, designating which hand and digit as well as the date.

“He was still warm when we found him,” I said. “I think I saw him fall.” I checked my watch. I didn’t realize how long we’d been up in the tower. About two hours had passed.

“I took preliminary photos with my phone,” she said. “Looks like a bruise forming on his cheek, but so far I haven’t found any other signs of violence. But there was something around his mouth. Maybe he’d vomited?”

“Yes, I didn’t see it, but the smell was there.” Thank goodness I hadn’t fallen in it. I’d only brought two pairs of jeans.

“I found the larger bags,” Ewan said as he made his way through the plastic sheeting. “Half the party has buggered off to bed, but Henry is circulating the photo among the last stragglers. I’m sure we’ll have more luck in the morning once everyone sobers up.”

“You know everyone here. Do the lights help?” I asked.

Ewan suited up. After placing the bags on the table with my medical bag, he put a plastic shield over his face, like the ones Abigail and I wore.

“Nay.”

“His hair is dyed blond,” Abigail said. “I’d say his natural color is closer to light brown.”

“Ewan, you don’t have to stay,” I said.

“As constable, I need to be here while you do the autopsy. We’re still in my jurisdiction. Do you think someone hurt him?”

“Abigail noticed some bruising on his cheek.” I pointed to his face. “It could have happened when he fell, but the outline of the contusion is oddly shaped. But it couldn’t have been easy getting him down that tight stairwell. Perhaps your men did it by accident.”

He opened his mouth but then shut it. “Aye, no easy way to get him down here. We had to hand him off.”

“You did your best,” I said. “You always do.”

His eyebrows went up.

“What?” I asked.

“You paid me a compliment.”

I snorted and then rolled my eyes. “Abigail, get some good photos of that.” I pointed to the bruise on his cheek.

The camera phone flashed brightly as I pushed open the dead man’s mouth. A sickly smell permeated my mask.

“What is that?” She turned her head away. I didn’t blame her. I’d worked in the ER for so long that nothing much bothered me, but the combination of vomit and the sickly sweet scent was a bit much even for me.

“He was quite ill leading up to his death. The pale skin and blue tinge of his mouth and tongue remind me of a case I had years ago, but for the life of me, I can’t remember.”

Abigail gasped.

“What is it?” Ewan asked.

“She never forgets anything,” Abigail said. “Are you okay?” She stared at me warily.

“I’ve been up for nearly twenty-four hours, and I’m doing an autopsy in a dungeon. I’m fine.”

“Wine cellar,” Ewan said.

I might have rolled my eyes at that point.

“Help me get his clothes off.”

The words came out harsher than I meant. “Sorry.”

She pulled down her mask. “I’m used to the cranky.” Then she smiled.

“Me too,” Ewan said.

We laughed.

“Okay. You two. This isn’t pick-on-Emilia day. Let’s get this done so we can all get to bed. This day has already been much too long.”

Ewan bagged the clothing and logged each piece of evidence on the sheet Abigail had created. The pair of them impressed me with their professionalism and how efficiently they worked.

“He can’t be more than thirty-one to thirty-five,” I said. “Though I’d say there’s a history of drug use.” I pointed to scars on his inner arm, where there were needle tracks.

“Maybe he overdosed,” Ewan said.

I shrugged. “I’m not seeing any new punctures, but I haven’t checked him completely. Abigail, get as much blood as possible. We’ll need to run tox screens when we get a chance.”

“Even with the big kit, I won’t be able to run everything you’ll need.”

“Understandable—just get me what you can.”

“Yes, Doc.”

There were faint bruises on his abdomen and his middle back, some of which were postmortem, most likely from Ewan’s men carrying the body down the stairs.

Without an X-ray machine, it was impossible to check for broken bones. But I moved my hands down his ribs and extremities carefully to feel for anything out of place.

“What is she doing?” Ewan whispered.

“Feeling for broken bones.” Abigail swabbed the mouth.

“The abdomen is distended,” I said. “I don’t think it’s the normal bloating we’d expect. Too soon for that.”

“I’ll take samples,” she said. Then she drew out our largest syringe and a long needle.

We worked for a few hours, and Ewan helped as if he'd been doing so for years.

While I couldn't do a full autopsy, I opened his chest to take a look.

"Hmm."

"What is it?" Abigail had been marking the many vials we collected and putting them in a cooler.

"Is it supposed to be like that?" Ewan asked. He'd leaned over to look at the heart.

"No. Pulmonary edema. He had a heart condition, or perhaps pneumonia. I won't know until we can run some tests. His lungs are damaged as well."

"Can the rest wait until tomorrow?" Ewan asked.

I bit my lip. While I'd never admit it to him, the first time I'd dealt with a body like this, it had been stolen from my office. By the time the body found its way back to me, most of the evidence had washed away.

In that case, Ewan wouldn't believe the victim had been murdered.

I'd proved him wrong.

Since then, I made a point of doing autopsies as quickly as possible.

I glanced at my watch. It was nearing four in the morning. None of us was at our best when we were this tired, even though I'd trained my body for years to be on, all the time in the ER. But one of the reasons I'd moved to Scotland was to stop killing myself.

After making sure everything was bagged, tagged, and stored in one of the wine fridges, I covered the corpse with a body bag.

I pulled off my gloves and threw them in the trash, along with my suit.

"What do you think, Doc?" Ewan asked.

I glanced at him and then Abigail.

"From the look of those kidneys, I don't know," I said. "When will we be able to get out of here?" I waved toward the fridge. "I've got to get back to my lab and test all of this."

"We're in for it. The blizzard won't stop for three days, they are saying."

"Three days? You mean none of us can leave for three days?"

"Aye."

"He's right," Abigail said.

"Can you at least tell me if he died of natural causes?" Ewan asked.

“Maybe an overdose?”

I shook my head. “The needle scars are old, and I didn’t see any punctures anywhere else on the body—not even between the toes, which is a favorite of drug users when they’ve blown all their veins.”

Abigail shook her head and frowned. “I think he ingested something that killed him. Food poisoning?”

“Then why isn’t everyone else sick?” Ewan asked.

“What makes you think that?” I asked Abigail.

“The blue around his mouth and eyes—the bloating. Some sort of toxin maybe?”

“None of us recognize him from the dinner, so maybe he ate somewhere else,” I said.

I thought about Mara. “I know it’s late, but can you check with the others and let me know if anyone else was sick. There was a lot of food last night at the dinner, and we’re all fine. But Mara didn’t drink wine at dinner and exhibited drunkenness after only a few drinks at the hen party. Usually she can drink us all under the table.”

Ewan’s eyebrow went up.

“I didn’t mean to insult you,” I said.

“I’m not upset about the drinking comment,” he said. “I’m worried the food is tainted.”

“It didn’t come from the meal last night, or we’d all be sick. And yet ... Mara’s sudden drunkenness is worrisome.”

“I’m not insulted, and there were leftovers. I’ll have one of my men bag samples from everything.”

“I don’t think it was the food, or we’d be hearing about more people being sick. But that’s a good idea.” Something niggled at the back of my brain.

I pulled off my mask. “Let’s get some sleep.”

One of my best traits was my brain’s ability to remember and categorize almost everything I saw.

But I’d only had four hours of sleep in the last forty-eight hours. Even I had to give myself some grace.

I shivered.

“Right, let’s get you upstairs.” Ewan ushered us out.

“I should check on Tommy,” Abigail said. At the top of the stairs, she went to the left, and Ewan followed me down the hallway.

“Something is bothering you. Tell me. Do you expect foul play?”

I shrugged.

“Come on, Em. I need to know. What does your gut say?”

Funny, how he’d grown to trust me, and he hardly ever—almost never—used my name.

I chewed on my lip. “I need to run some tests before I can be sure.”

“It’s foul play, isn’t it?” He stopped and then crossed his arms.

“Yes. If it turns out to be poison—and I believe it is—then we have a killer in the castle.”

Chapter Three

Five hours later, I woke up with another headache. After a shower and two bottles of water, I felt slightly better, but coffee was on my agenda. Mara was up and had left the room, so that was a good sign. I'd hooked her up to an IV from my kit for a few hours and set an alarm to take it out. She'd slept through everything.

Flooding her body with fluids was the best way to rid it of the toxins. I didn't know if she'd been poisoned, but it never hurt to use caution in that regard.

I opened the door to the hall and nearly ran into Ewan, who held a silver tray with a coffeepot on it.

The man was a mind reader. If I hadn't been so caffeine desperate, I might have thought it was strange that he'd showed up when he did.

"Please tell me that is for me."

"Aye." He moved past me to put the tray on the round table near the door. After pouring two cups, he handed me one.

He started to speak, but I held up a hand.

"You know the rules. Half a cup." We'd worked together enough that he understood. He sat patiently while I took a couple of sips.

"Okay, any word on who our victim is?"

He shook his head. "Most of the wedding party is still asleep. I asked around the household staff. No one recognized him."

"Strange that he made it past security."

"Aye. Even odder he had no identification on him."

"It may be in his room."

"True, but which one? All the rooms and people invited are accounted

for, and I've gone through the list three times with our security team. We have rooms left for guests yet to come, but they are all empty."

I frowned. "Someone might have brought a plus-one at the last minute. It happens. Ewan, have you slept?"

The bags under his eyes said it all.

"Not yet. If we have a killer in the castle, we need to work fast. Any thoughts on how the victim died?"

"I've been thinking about that since I woke up. I may have misspoke," I admitted. "I'm not sure we have a murder on our hands, but from the devastation in the kidneys, I'd say poison. There is no proof it's something he ingested on the premises. The fluids in his heart, lungs—and the crystals in his kidneys—are different symptoms for a variety of ailments. That's what has me hung up."

"But if it's poison, that means someone planned to harm him. Why bring him at all?"

I shrugged. "You said the Carthages were really worried about security."

He nodded.

"Could he have been here to harm one of them? Maybe his plan to poison them went awry."

Ewan rubbed the bridge of his nose. "As you know, poison is personal."

"Right. And statistically, perpetrated by women. Ugh. I don't know. Until I can test and figure out what kind of poison, this is all pointless speculation."

"We need to find out who he is."

"I agree," I said.

The door opened slowly, and Mara peeked into the room. "Oh, you're up." Then she smiled at Ewan. "You have company—sorry."

"We're working," I said. "Well, trying to figure out what happened to the dead man. I'm not quite ready for work yet. My brain needs a few more gallons of this." I held up my cup.

"That's what I came to tell you. Brunch is ready. Wait—I thought that was my fevered dreams from last night. Did someone really die?"

She'd been out of it last night. I told her I'd had to put an IV in, and she said she'd overdone it yesterday. Not once had she woken up. I'd left her a

note in the bathroom, explaining the bandage on her arm—that I'd only been looking out for her.

I was surprised she hadn't heard anything from the household staff.

Ewan told her what happened, then held up a picture on his phone. "Do you remember seeing him last night?"

Mara blew out a breath. "My memories from last night blur heavily right after dinner. I don't remember him. I can't believe someone died last night. That's terrible."

As yet, we had no proof the man had been murdered, and news like that might send people into a panic.

"Do me a favor and shut down any gossip you might hear today," I said. "Since everyone is stuck here, we don't need any sort of alarm. Without doing some more tests, I won't have a complete analysis. If anyone asks, tell them a man died. There was no sign of a struggle."

"Why do I feel like you aren't telling me everything?"

"Because I don't know everything yet."

Fortunately, if the wind rattling the windows was any indication, none of us could leave. That gave us time to figure out what had happened.

Or was that unfortunately?

We may be trapped with a killer.

"Let's head down to brunch. Maybe someone there will know who he is," I said.

★ ★ ★

Brunch was a far more subdued affair in the formal dining room than the meal had been the night before. Although Scots handled their alcohol better than most, there were a few folks rubbing their temples and looking a bit pale.

Some people filled their plates while some nibbled on fruit. Others sat nursing nothing but a cup of coffee or tea.

The storm outside, which blew snow so hard the glass shuddered at times, was in direct contrast to the quietness of the room.

Angie came in with her hair piled on top of her head and dressed in a circus-striped pantsuit. "What's going on?" she demanded. She pointed at

Ewan. “One of the housekeepers told me somebody died last night.” She was pale and grabbed her head as if her shouting had caused pain.

There were gasps around the room.

Ewan had been near one of the sideboards, talking with Damien, the groom, who moved to stand beside his bride. He wrapped his arm around her.

“Everything is all right, luv.”

“Tell me.” She glanced around the room as if counting her friends and family.

“We did have a fatality in the tower,” Ewan said authoritatively. “We’re looking into it, and we could use everyone’s help in identifying the victim. So far, no one knows who he is.”

I wasn’t a detective, but I did find myself watching people carefully. There was something in the groom’s eyes. Fear, worry—it was difficult to tell.

His father, Mr. Carthage, had an eyebrow up, and Angie’s mom appeared angry.

“What happened to him, and does that mean the wedding is canceled?” Angie asked. Her eyes watered. She wasn’t one for crying, and her hands shook. Something was off with her.

“No,” the groom and Angie’s mom said fiercely at the same time. That stunned everyone to silence.

“We aren’t going to let the death of a stranger stop us from getting married,” the groom said softly.

“Maybe it’s a sign,” the groom’s father said.

“Dad,” Damien said sharply.

“What do you mean by that?” Angie pulled out of her groom’s arm.

“That you aren’t—you are not the right woman for my son.”

“*Stop.*” The groom growled the word.

Angie snorted and fire lit her eyes. “You probably murdered someone to keep us from marrying. Well, I say it just adds to the atmosphere that someone died at my gothic wedding.”

As if realizing what she’d just said, Angie groaned. “I can’t believe I said that. You”—she pointed to her soon-to-be father-in-law—“bring out the worst in everyone.”

She turned back to Damien. “I’m sorry. I’m out of sorts this morning.” She grabbed the side of her head as if she were in pain again. I’d ask her if she needed tablets in a bit.

“Constable, what do you need from us?” Damien asked. He pulled Angie back into his arms. She laid her head on his shoulder. “Don’t let him get to you, babe,” he said as he stroked her cheek with his thumb.

“Everyone, stay calm—we will get this sorted,” Ewan said. “The man may have been a vagrant hiding out. Until we have his identity, I ask that you all forgive us, but everyone will need to answer a few questions.

There was grumbling around the room.

I’d had no idea Damien’s father didn’t approve of the union. Angie had said Damien wasn’t like his stuck-up family, but there was obviously more to the story.

Damien’s parents had forgone the events last night, claiming exhaustion from the two-hour drive, so we hadn’t spent much time with them.

“Do you know what happened?” Angie asked me from across the room.

“How would she know?” her mom asked.

“She’s the coroner, Mom, and a bloody wonderful doctor.”

Most of the room seemed surprised by this news. They all turned to look at me. I stared at my coffee.

If there were possible killers in the room, I would have rather they not know I’d be trying to find them.

“I need to know what you think,” Angie said.

“I don’t have answers for you yet, but as Ewan said, we’re working on it.”

“Do you know if it was an accident?” Damien asked.

For all I knew, the victim could have swallowed the poison on purpose. Highly unlikely, but I didn’t have a reply for them.

“We can’t be sure until more testing is done. No outwardly sign of bodily harm, though.” That was as honest an answer as I could give.

“Until there is more information, there isn’t much more that we can tell you,” Ewan said, interrupting whatever I’d been about to say. He gave me the arched eyebrow, which probably meant I’d said too much.

I sighed.

“For now, go ahead with your plans,” he continued. “We will be spending the next three days together, as the pass is closed.”

“Bloody hell,” one of the groomsmen complained. Byron was the one I’d been seated next to at dinner. All he’d talked about was rugby and his injuries from the sport. “I’ve business to do, and the phones aren’t working.”

“We’ve lost our cell tower to the storm,” Ewan said. “Happened last night around one. Please be patient. I’ll need everyone to make themselves available to Dr. McRoy and myself.”

“Are you sure we should carry on with the wedding?” Angie asked.

She was so pale, more so than usual.

“Like I said, thanks to the weather we can’t go anywhere,” Ewan said. “It was most likely an accident. There’s no reason not to carry on. Please make yourselves available for our questions.”

“The victim’s a man? Well, if your security is up to snuff, he should be on the list,” Mr. Carthage said. I didn’t know him, but already I was not a fan of Damien’s dad.

“Mr. Carthage, perhaps we will speak to you first,” Ewan said.

I hid my smile behind a napkin.

The man huffed. “I have an important paper to work on. It will have to wait.” Then he stormed off.

“Why don’t you finish your brunch, and then we’ll chat with each of you soon,” Ewan said to those who lingered.

I had a feeling that was more to keep everyone busy. Nothing like a castle full of people worried about a dead guy. They had to be wondering if he’d been killed.

I would.

Mara sat down next to me. “Did you see stepmother number three?” she whispered.

“Which one is that?”

“Sitting next to the hunky groomsman, Josh. She’s the youngest one.” I had no idea who she was talking about, but I followed her eyeline. The woman next to him was smiling and had a hand on his arm. It was intro 101 in the flirting handbook.

Not that I’d read the handbook. I was terrible at that sort of thing.

“Is she the current one? I can’t tell them apart.”

“Yes. Angie’s dad isn’t here, but it’s not like she’s trying to hide her interest in Josh. I saw them canoodling last night before the dinner. It makes you wonder what kind of relationship she has with Angie’s dad.”

The stepmother was closer to the groomsman’s age than she was to Angie’s dad’s. Mara and I had been privy to the truce called among the stepmothers and mother for the wedding. The negotiations had been like something out of the UN, but so far, they were all behaving—sort of.

“When they were all sitting down at the table during the hen party, I seriously couldn’t tell them apart.”

“It is kind of weird that they look and dress the same,” she said. “Who will you talk to first?”

“I’m surprised Ewan wants to include me, but I’m not sure.”

The groom and bride seemed the most likely people to identify the dead guy—that is, if he was with someone in the wedding party. They were the only two people who should know all the friends and family.

I prayed we’d figure it out quickly. Starting with who the poor man might be. As the coroner, it was my job to speak for the dead, and I took that seriously. I would give him the due diligence he deserved.

★ ★ ★

A half hour later, most women had been called away to work on some pillows for the bride and groom’s special day.

The men were off playing snooker.

The staff had cleaned up the dining room, leaving only coffee, tea, and assorted pastries for latecomers.

It dawned on me that I’d been here for twenty-four hours and still hadn’t seen poor Jasper. He’d become a great friend and was a part of my little family in Sea Isle. That said, he was a perfectionist and tended to lose himself in his work. I made a mental note to check on him later.

Mara downed water like she’d been adrift at sea for weeks.

“Are you okay?”

“I don’t know,” she said. “My head is so woozy. It’s like I’m surrounded by a fog, and I can’t get enough to drink. I need to know what was in that

punch. Nothing has ever affected me like this.”

“Why don’t you go rest?” I whispered.

“I need to check on Jasper. He’s in creative mode and doesn’t like to be bothered.” She smiled. “It’s no wonder he has trouble finding assistants at the bakery. He was quite snippy when I asked if he wanted help. From what I could tell this morning, he may have slept in the prep room last night. He doesn’t want anyone near those cakes.”

I smiled. “He is a perfectionist.” With a good case of OCD, for which he took medication. He was my patient, and I couldn’t tell her that. He also had loads of anxiety, and we’d been working on exercises to help him with that too. Being a GP meant dealing with a variety of ailments on any given day. It wasn’t much different from the ER.

After Mara left, I sat with Ewan at the end of the table, with the groom.

“Do you have any idea who he is?” Ewan showed Damien the pictures he’d taken of the body.

Damien squinted. “It could be someone I know, but I have no idea why he would be here. It doesn’t make any sense.”

“Who do you think it is?” I asked.

He shook his head. “It could be Angie’s ex and my former best mate, Robbie.”

Ewan and I frowned.

“Why aren’t you sure it’s him?” Ewan asked.

“His hair and nose are different.” Damien pointed to the picture. He had a posh English accent. Angie had told us it came from his family shipping him off to boarding schools in England at an early age. “It can’t be him, though. Last I heard, he was making a go of it in New York. We haven’t seen him in years.”

“Maybe he came back.” Ewan watched the other man carefully. “Could he have been jealous and wanting to stop the wedding?”

“Aye, he was the type.” the groom said. “Still, I haven’t seen him in five years. Not since that night Angie broke up with him. His nose had been smashed in a few times and was bent to the right back then. But this guy’s is different. That’s why I’m not certain it’s Robbie.”

The surgeon must have done a fantastic job. I hadn’t noticed plastic

surgery scars. Though, I'd be checking more closely a bit later.

"Could it be a relative of your friend?" I asked.

He shrugged. "Not anyone who looked like him—at least, as far as I remember. Why would he be here? He hates us—Angie and me. Like I said, we haven't heard from him since that day."

"Do you know if he and Angie were in contact?" I asked.

Damien's cheeks flamed red, and he closed his eyes. "She would tell me."

"Is it possible someone brought him as a plus-one and he wasn't on the list?" Ewan asked.

"Why?" The groom held up his hands. "Why would someone want so much drama for Angie and me? These people are supposed to love us, although I'm beginning to wonder."

"Do you mean your dad?" I asked. "Tell us what's going on there."

Damien took a deep breath and blew it out.

"It's nothing to do with the dead man, I assure you. My father is a snob. Angie's family is perfectly respectable. She is the brightest and most beautiful woman I've ever met, and she's incredibly successful. My father believes the multiple marriages of her parents are—like I said, I come from a family of snobs. All 'blue blood' means is there is inbreeding among the ranks. That sort of thing has never mattered to me."

He was right about Angie, and his voice had swelled with pride when he spoke about her.

"Like my parents are the epitome of the happy marriage."

"Do you think your father could have brought Robbie along to cause trouble?"

The groom put his head in his hands. "I'd have said that was a ridiculous idea a few weeks ago. But now—they were furious when they found out all the steps were coming to the wedding.

"There was a scene between a couple of the stepmothers at the engagement party—my parents were embarrassed in front of their friends. And if nothing else, they are all about appearances.

"But they wouldn't have invited Robbie. They disliked him when we grew older and thought he was a bad influence on me back in the day. They

weren't wrong."

His father might have stooped to anything given his adamant disapproval of poor Angie.

Then why kill him?

Yep, that part didn't make sense.

Unless Damien or Angie caught sight of and poisoned him?

No. If he did die from poison, that had taken planning. It wasn't like the poison had just been sitting around—or was it?

Those kidneys. There was something so familiar, and that small niggling in my brain formed into a complete thought.

"Oh."

I didn't realize I'd said something out loud until Ewan and Damien turned to look at me.

"I think we need to talk to Angie," I said.

"Isn't it enough that someone has died at our wedding? She's a strong one, my Angie, but she's been through enough."

"We'll be talking to everyone," Ewan said. "I need you to find her and bring her to us. Dinnae tell her who you think is in these pictures. Do you understand? We want her honest reaction."

"You think she could kill someone?"

Ewan sighed. "Nay. But I don't want you influencing her identification process. Actually, I'll go find her. You stay here."

Damien sat back and crossed his arms. "I wanted everything to be so perfect for her," he said.

"It will be." I patted his arm. "You've been through so much to get here, and I know she wants it to be special for you as well. We will make this work."

"I'd be happy marrying her on a street corner, as long as she's mine." He smiled. "I love her so."

While I'd only met him a few times before this weekend, he was a good guy. Angie might be a bit on the wild side, but she was an incredible human being.

He leaned his elbows on the table. "You're one of her best friends. Do you think she's been chattin' with Robbie?"

“No.” I said the word because he needed to hear it, but I wasn’t sure. We were close, but maybe she didn’t tell me and Mara everything. “She hasn’t mentioned anything about him. If he’d been bothering her, she would have said something to Mara and me.”

That I did believe. Angie understood we had her back, no matter the circumstances.

“Aye. I know it in my bones, but I just don’t understand why he’s here. If it is him. Why does he look so different? He wasn’t the type to have plastic surgery or dye his hair. None of this makes a bit of sense.”

Why would someone go to the trouble to disguise himself and crash a wedding?

The answer was a simple one.

If he was up to no good.

Chapter Four

Angie sat at the end of the table where Damien had been a few minutes before. She'd been crying. Ewan had asked Damien to leave the room for a few minutes, promising he could come back soon.

Ewan and I glanced across the table at each other.

"We're going to have to call it off, aren't we?" Angie asked. "I mean, I know we have to, but it's—"

"Too much, right now. I can't even imagine how you must feel," I said.

"Lass, your wedding will continue—no worries there." Ewan was so sweet with her, and it touched my heart. I'd never understand why he got along so well with everyone but me. "And no, you don't have to call anything off. It's unfortunate what has happened, but we aren't going anywhere anytime soon. It's a good idea to keep everyone busy."

The windows rattled around us. I shivered. Of all the times for a blizzard.

"We have a few more days of this." He waved a hand toward the window. "I meant what I said. "

"The other guests won't make it, will they? My own father won't be at my wedding."

He wrapped his hands around her fists which were on the table. "Angie, we will make your wedding happen, no matter what."

"Really? It feels wrong. Even if it is a stranger who passed. You have to know I didn't mean what I said earlier. Why am I crying so much? I don't cry."

"Do you feel all right?" Her porcelain skin appeared even whiter than normal. Maybe she and Mara had caught a bug.

She lifted her hands. "I feel blotted. Like down is up, and I'm in some

wicked *Alice in Wonderland* story. I swear to you I didn't drink that much. In fact, most of the night I had water. I want to be able to fit in my dress, and alcohol makes me swell."

"Come by my room later, and I'll see if I can find something to help clear your head."

"Thanks, luv. What would I do without you?"

Ewan cleared his throat. "We need you to look at a few pictures and tell us if you recognize the person in them."

She pursed her lips. "I don't understand. Why would I know them?"

Ewan let go of her hands and then grabbed his phone off the table. "Just look," he prompted.

She stared at the phone and then frowned.

"It can't be," she whispered. "Why does he look like that? He's dead?"

"Who?" I asked.

"Robbie. He looks like my ex or someone who could be a twin. I don't understand." She picked up the phone and brought it closer to her face. "Robbie is dead?"

Her face crumpled and her hands shook.

Ewan took the phone from her.

"Has he been in contact at all?" Ewan asked. I was happy I didn't have to pose that question to her.

"Not in years. I saw him once in a pub, maybe four years ago."

"What happened then?" I took her hand in mine as a sign of support.

"He stopped me on my way out of the pub. He apologized to me. Said he hadn't treated me right. That hitting a woman was never appropriate. That it had taken him a year of getting sober, but he understood why I'd fallen for Damien. He told me he was clean for the first time in years, and he hoped I was happy.

"He'd been planning to send me a letter to apologize. Said it was part of his sobriety."

"You never told me about the mistreatment," I said. "Did he hurt you?"

"Gave me a black eye," she said. "I threw away his gear, and he lost it on me. Back then, he'd told me that he'd stopped using, but he lied.

"After he hit me, he left. I called Damien. We were all best friends then,

and he was so close to Robbie. When Robbie walked in on Damien trying to comfort me, he took it wrong. They got into a huge, brutal fight. Damien punched him. Then he got me out of there.”

“Angie, that isn’t the story you told me,” I said. “You said he walked in on you guys doing the—well, you know.”

“I wasn’t going to tell my new friend that I let some guy punch me up. Damien had his arms around me, and I was crying on his shoulder. That’s all Robbie needed to see. He went crazy.”

“So, there is a history of violence between the three of you,” Ewan said.

She closed her eyes. “It makes Damien and me sound bad. He was only protecting me that night. Robbie was high as a kite and out of his mind. If Damien hadn’t been there, I don’t know what would have happened.”

“Is it possible your fiancé might have been trying to protect you again?” As soon as I posed the question, I regretted it. But men had done worse things in the name of love.

“You’ve met Damien. He is a good guy. The best, Em.” She was angry at me for even thinking such a thing. I understood.

But my former husband had been kind and loving. At the same time, he’d been the king of duplicity. I’d never suspected anything. That is, until I found him dead in a hotel room with another man.

“We’re trying to get the facts straight,” Ewan added. “We aren’t saying anyone killed him. We need to know as much about him as we can, to determine what happened.”

“What if he was here to hurt one of us?” she asked. “Maybe he lied that night I saw him in the pub. What if, he didnae understand at all and has been planning this for years? What better way to ruin a wedding than to kill yourself?”

Ewan and I glanced at each other again. That idea made more sense than someone bringing him, only to knock him off before he could cause any damage.

“Was the location of the wedding posted in the paper? Or on the invitations?” I asked, because I didn’t remember seeing Morrigan’s Castle on there.

“No. The Carthages didn’t want the location leaked to the media,” she

said. “The wedding party and our families knew we’d be here, but all the other guests showing up for the ceremony and reception know only that they’ll receive a text the day before the wedding ceremony, telling them where the venue is.

“But now they can’t get here because of the weather.” She let go of my hand and crossed her arms. “Maybe Mr. Carthage is right. The weather and Robbie dying are signs. Not necessarily in that order.”

“Nonsense,” I said adamantly.

She and Ewan jerked back.

“Sorry, gang. I’m thinking that someone here planned all of this. Not the weather, mind you. That’s just Scotland as far as I can tell.”

“You aren’t wrong.” Ewan smirked. “About the weather that is.”

“Angie, we need you and Damien to keep the victim’s identity a secret a while longer, okay? If someone in the wedding party planned all of this, we don’t want them to know anything—at least, not yet. My hope is that it was Robbie’s idea, and perhaps his death was through misadventure.”

She rubbed her temples. “I can’t tell if it’s all the stress or from the drinks last night, but I’ve got the worst headache,” she said. “Is there any chance you have something that could help me out now? And maybe a little something for my nerves?”

Headaches. Mara had a terrible one as well. What if someone had poisoned more than one person?

Not wanting to panic her, I smiled. “Of course. Why don’t you and Damien take a break from everything. You can hide out in my room, if you want.”

She frowned, as did Ewan. “We have a suite of rooms. Why would we need to hide?”

What if my friends have been poisoned, as well?

“I need to do some tests,” I said. “On you and Damien. And”—I glanced at Ewan—“Mara.”

Angie gasped. “You think someone tried to hurt us? What’s wrong with me? How can you tell? I only had one or two drinks. I don’t understand. Am I going to die?”

I swallowed hard. “I want to make sure you’re okay, that’s all.” There

was no reason to upset her, and there was a fifty percent chance I was wrong about the niggling in my brain.

Angie might be telling the truth about drinking water. Even if she wasn't, I'd seen her down more whiskey in one night than most people had in a month. She always woke up bright-eyed.

It was annoying.

But it was obvious she wasn't feeling well.

"Do you remember anything weird about last night?"

She shook her head. "It's such a blur. Wait. The water had a weird, sweet taste. I gave it to Mara to try, and I think she downed it."

Boom. Everything came together in my brain.

"Ewan, I need you to find Mara now. Angie, come with me."

"Also, Ewan?"

"Aye?"

"Your staff has probably cleaned out or dumped everything from the party last night, right?"

He nodded.

"Can you see if there is any of the punch left somewhere? And the bottles of water. They were in glass containers. We need to check those. I think I have a diabetes test in my kit."

"You think we have diabetes?" Angie asked. It was obvious she and Ewan were confused.

I ushered Angie out quickly, and Ewan followed. "And grab Abigail. I'll need her."

"What is it you're so worried about?" he asked.

"I need to do a test first. Just find them, okay? And after you bring them to my room, find out if anyone else is sick."

"You're scaring me," Angie whispered.

"It's okay. I'm going to fix everything," I said. However, it depended on how much of the toxins were still in their blood.

If I was right, though, time was not on our side. The poison could be destroying the organs of my friends as I spoke.

"Hurry," I called out.

"Will do."

Damien stood right outside the room.

“Are you okay, Babe?” He took Angie in his arms and hugged her tight.

“Do you think it’s really him?” she whispered.

“Yes.”

“Em wants us to head to her room. She’s afraid someone is trying to kill us.”

I snorted. “That’s not what I said. I just want to run a few tests.”

“Is she okay?” Damien asked worriedly.

So many questions, and I had no answers.

“She will be,” I said, more to convince myself than anyone.

They followed me down the hall, but we were stopped by a slightly younger version of Damien.

“Caleb? How did you get here?” Damien asked.

“Hey, bro. I thought you’d be happy to see me.” The two men stared at each other with surprise, which was weird.

“I am. But no one can get through this storm.”

“I’ve been here. Sorry—I slept through everything last night. I’d been awake for the previous seventy-two hours.”

Damien frowned. “So, it’s all sorted.”

“Aye. Misunderstanding is all. Didn’t even have to call *him*.”

I assumed *him* was their father. He was an unpleasant man. I couldn’t imagine he made his sons’ lives very easy.

As far as I was concerned, anyone who didn’t like Angie had something wrong with them. She was the most likeable, fun-loving person I knew.

“Who is this lovely chippie,” his brother asked.

“Dr. McRoy,” I said, and held out my hand.

“Dooooctor. Whoa. The PhD type or one who actually contributes to society?”

“Caleb,” Angie said. “Be nice. She’s a very talented doctor and my friend.”

“I’m an MD, but many of my friends, who also contribute to society, have PhDs. For the record, that is.”

He threw his hands up in surrender. “No offense, Doc.”

Handsome, yes, but he oozed that sort of unaffected charm men

sometimes had. I'd worked with many men like him. They were not my favorites.

"If you'll excuse us, your brother and Angie were about to help me with something."

We had no time to deal with relatives. I prayed Ewan found Mara quickly.

He shrugged. "Don't let me keep you. I'm on the hunt for food."

"Kitchen is down the hall and to the left," Damien instructed.

The other man sauntered off.

"I apologize for my brother," Damien said.

"It's not your fault."

"Odd that no one told us he arrived," Angie said.

Damien shrugged. "Knowing my brother, he didn't bother to say anything. Probably plopped in a room and passed out."

Something about Caleb bothered me. The brothers seemed happy to see each other, but what if that was a ruse? The conversation between Byron and Damien flashed through my brain. Had they been talking about his brother?

And if no one had seen Caleb the night before, could he be our poisoner? Something wasn't right about him.

My mind had become like an Agatha Christie novel where every character was a suspect.

But first, I had to save my friends.

★ ★ ★

Forty-five minutes later, Abigail and I had set up a mobile lab in the large bathroom of my suite.

Damien and Angie had fallen asleep on the sofa near the fireplace in the other room. I'd given them tablets to help their headaches and then started an IV to help flush out Angie's system.

I'd done the same with Mara—again. If I was right about the poison, every second counted. If I was wrong, they'd be fully hydrated and would be none the worse.

A timer dinged, and Abigail turned it off quickly.

"Which one is that?"

“Dead guy,” she said. We’d been testing for a variety of poisons. I don’t know why I didn’t think about it last night, other than because I’d been exhausted.

“It’s positive,” she said. I checked the results, and she was correct.

We sat down on the edge of the tub.

“There were crystals in the kidneys,” she said.

“And they were badly damaged. He had to have drunk a lot of it.”

“How would you get someone to ingest that much, though? Wouldn’t he taste it? We didn’t find any injection sites except for his old scars.”

“It has a sweet taste and would be easy to mix into any drink.

“Was it in the punch last night? Is that why Ang and Mara feel so bad? I drank a wee bit before I left, and I’m fine.”

“Then it probably wasn’t in the punch,” I said.

The timer went off on my phone, and I shut it off. We glanced at each other and then stood.

“What if ...?”

“Do not complete that sentence.”

It was faint, but there were trace elements in Angie’s test. “She said the water tasted sweet, and she didn’t drink much of it. We need to find out who gave her the water and where she picked it up.”

I rolled the conversation I’d had with my friend around in my brain.

“What do we do?”

“We have to find the source and make sure it’s not in the ground water.”

“I’ve been drinking tons of water out of the taps,” she said. “It just tasted a bit like sulfur—water from the old wells often does.”

“Get in my kit and see if I have any fomepizole. I’m not taking any chances.”

“Do you think ...?”

“Now, Abigail. Put it in their IVs.” I gave her the dosage.

She hurried off.

I called Ewan on the walkie-talkie he’d given us. The phones and internet weren’t working, with no cell service.

“What is it?” There were people talking loudly around him.

“Someone tried to kill Angie and Mara.”

“What do you mean someone tried to kill them?”

The voices around him hushed.

“They had trace amounts of the same poison that killed the victim. I’m worried that maybe Robbie, Angie, and Mara weren’t the only ones.”

“Do you know what kind of poison?”

“Antifreeze.”

“Bloody hell.”

Exactly.

Chapter Five

Ewan and his men gathered bottles from the trash and recycling bins, and Abigail set up a table downstairs to test them. The dishes from the night before had already been washed. My next job was to speak with my friends, to narrow down exactly what happened the night before.

Thanks to some McGyvering with diabetes test strips, I was able to confirm that Mara and Angie had been poisoned by the liquid. Neither of them had been in the mood to remember the night before, however.

“Why would someone try to kill us?” Angie’s voice was full of upset. “Do you think that’s why Robbie was here?”

“And why me?” Mara asked from the bed. “I didn’t even know him.”

“That’s why I need you two to calm down and take me through your movements last night. At any time, did you share food or drink?”

“The water bottle I told you about,” Angie said.

“Oh, that’s right. She didn’t like the taste, and she handed it to me. I chugged a bit, but she’d been right. It tasted almost like sugar water.”

“What did you do with the bottle, Mara?”

She shrugged. “I can’t remember. I was so hot and felt nauseous from eating so many sweets. I couldn’t find you, so I left the party.”

“I need you to answer the question. Are we going to die like Robbie?” Angie pointed a finger at me.

“No.”

“Swear,” Mara said.

I held up a hand. “Your latest tests were clear. We’ll want to do scans when we can get out of here to make certain the ethylene glycol had no ill effects on your organs, but I’m certain you will be fine.” They had ingested

so little of it, and without knowing, I'd flushed most of it out of Mara's system.

Well, I had known something wasn't right with her last night. Flushing her system had been the best course of action, and hydrating her body so it could work the right way for her.

"Where's Damien?"

"Abigail made him go downstairs with her, to help. I think she noticed his hovering over me was driving me mad. He's so protective, and if he asked me again if Robbie had contacted me, I would have throttled him."

"I would have helped," Mara interjected. "He was rather worried about that aspect of the situation."

The walkie-talkie in my cardigan squawked. Angie and Mara jumped.

"Doctor, any news?"

I pressed the button down. "Tests were clear this last time. They are out of danger. Any luck?"

"We've been through everything and haven't found the delivery system. Abigail says everything is clean."

I told him about the water bottle. "It's the only thing they shared last night. It has to be there."

"It is not," he said.

"So, someone is hiding the evidence."

He didn't say anything for a few seconds.

"Bloody hell. I'll start a search of the rooms."

One thing Ewan and I agreed on: this was an active situation.

"What does that mean? You both sound upset," Angie said.

I didn't want to worry her unnecessarily, but she needed to always stay aware.

"Either Robbie hid the evidence somewhere no one can find it, or we have a secondary killer."

My friends gasped.

"No, that can't be," Angie said.

"Who would want to kill you, Angie?" Mara asked.

"I hope no one," she said. "I mean, as Damien said, the people here love us. Why would they try to hurt us?"

“Hopefully, we’re only looking at Robbie, who had motive and opportunity,” I said.

They seemed pacified with that.

But why would Robbie have killed himself in a tower where no one might find him for days? That didn’t make sense. And how had he ingested the poison? There were no bottles or liquids at the crime scene. Ewan had checked.

The biggest thing that worried me was that if there was more than one killer, he or she might try again. Ewan’s men were on alert and would be searching rooms while guests were at the various events. It was his house, and he had the right to search anywhere he pleased without warning.

That was the law according to Ewan, and I didn’t disagree.

I had so many questions. We had to catch the other killer before they did any more damage.

My friends could have died, and I had to make the killer pay.

* * *

A few hours later, the cozy mixer began in the front ballroom. Azure couches and chairs in luxurious velvet were spaced around the room, creating seating areas that made the large room feel comfortable and lounge-like. The lighting was subtle, and tables had been spaced throughout, with more chairs.

There weren’t many people there when I first arrived.

A huge roaring fireplace, another one of those where several people could fit inside, centered the room with a warm glow. Two buffets had been set up at each end of the room, on long tables.

Jasper, our resident baker in Sea Isle, pointed at the waitstaff setting up the dessert tables. “Make sure you stack them according to the plan.”

He glanced over and waved me toward him.

“Is it true?” He whispered the words. He wore jeans and a chef’s coat, which was neat as a pin.

“I need context,” I said.

“That someone died and tried to murder our friends?”

“Oh my, don’t those pink macarons look tasty. What flavor are they?”

He snorted. “Nice try. Give. And don’t say you can’t comment on an

ongoing investigation. It's me. Do you have a picture of the dead guy? I was asleep when Ewan's men questioned the kitchen staff."

I pulled out my phone and showed him one of the pics Abigail had sent me during our examination.

"Do you recognize him?"

Jasper raised an eyebrow.

"What?"

"I think when I arrived with the van, he was by the garage. He carried a couple of jugs. It was only for a few seconds, but it was him."

Jugs of antifreeze?

"Do you remember what color the jugs were?"

"Not really. As I turned around in the drive, he was heading out of the garages. I thought he was cute. I kept an eye out while I was in the kitchen but didn't see him after that."

"Can you give me any more details?"

"Why? Oh. My. Gawd. Is he the killer?" He was a bit loud, and people turned our way.

"Jasper." I put a finger to my lips.

"Sorry. I really do have the worst taste in men."

"You and me both, my friend." We'd shared many stories about our lives the past three months. Neither of us had been particularly successful in the relationship department.

"I don't know if he's the killer. Only that he's dead by ingesting a poison."

"If he's the killer, why do himself in?"

"That's a question Ewan and I very much want answered."

"How are our friends? Are they feeling okay?"

"Better. Are you certain he wasn't in the kitchen at any time?"

"I locked myself away in the room off the kitchen to work on the cakes yesterday. But no, I didn't see him again. How were our friends poisoned?"

"That's another question I don't have an answer for at the moment. We think, possibly, with a water bottle."

"That's frightening. Is that why they tested all the food today?"

"Yes. Ewan was worried more than the water had been contaminated."

“Oh. Wait. The liquid in the jugs was a light blue. I remember thinking the color matched his eyes.”

“Thank you for that.”

“Was the poison in the jugs? It was coolant, right?”

“Yes, we think it was antifreeze he ingested. That’s what the tests are saying.”

“That couldn’t have been pleasant. Why would the dead guy try to kill Angie and Mara?”

“We don’t know.”

“You’re smart—you’ll figure it out.”

“I’m glad someone has faith in me.”

He snorted again. “Stop. You are like Nancy Drew with the mysteries.”

“I think I’m closer to Miss Marple’s age.”

He hooted with laughter. “Lass, that is not true. You’d pass for late twenties any day.”

“And that’s one of the many reasons we are friends. Even if you are an amazing liar. Mara and Abigail said you were working too hard again. Promise me you’ll get some rest tonight.”

He gave me a salute. “Yes, Doc. I’m almost finished with the fine details of the cake.”

By the time we’d finished chatting, the room had filled up. I found Mara on one of the sofas nearest the fire.

“You have that weird look in your eyes,” I said. “I’m sorry I misdiagnosed your illness last night.”

“Stop,” she said sharply.

“What? Am I pressing too hard?” I let go of her wrist. I’d been taking her pulse, which was healthy.

“No.” She pointed to my head. “I can see the wheels turning, and you keep giving me the guilty face. You didn’t do this to me. There was no way you could have possibly known what happened.”

“You could have died.” Saying the words out loud sent my mind spinning. Mara had quickly become one of my dearest friends, and my go-to human. It wasn’t one-sided. We relied on each other heavily to get through the crazy world.

“Who knew water was so dangerous?”

“About that.”

She held her hand out in a stop motion. “I do remember sharing that water with Angie.” She put a hand on her forehead. “I put the water down on one of the tables by the window. Then I went and got us some of that punch, but before I drank much of it, I started feeling so strange.

“I wish we could find that bottle, but the last time I checked, nothing else was contaminated. And they can’t find the poison anywhere.” I needed to tell Ewan about our victim being near the garages with antifreeze.

“Okay, I have a question I’m afraid to ask, but you said something to Ewan earlier that made me wonder.”

“What’s that?”

“I could see why Angie’s ex might want to kill her.” She shivered. “It’s horrible, and we’ve seen enough mysteries to understand revenge. I’m sure that’s what it was. But why kill himself?”

“You aren’t the only one to wonder about the answer to that one.”

“So, what you said in our room is true? There is someone else?”

“It’s early days. Someone was in the tower with Robbie. And I can’t imagine he’d kill himself with that poison. It’s a very painful way to go.”

She grimaced. “I’m glad I didn’t have to find that out—thanks to your quick thinking.”

I waved her away.

“Ewan says no one left before the storm yesterday. I need you to be extra careful. Do not eat or drink anything that someone hands you. Promise.”

“I promise.

“Are we going to be okay? I worried maybe you were just trying to make Angie feel better. Can you imagine being a bride and all of this happens?”

“Your last blood test is all clear. And no, I can’t imagine. The stress has to be killing her. We promised we’d be here for moral support. We need to make sure she stays calm.”

“Agreed,” Mara said. “Why would anyone want to kill Angie? She’s amazing.”

“I can’t believe I’m saying this out loud, but I somewhat hope it was the ex—and he made a mistake that killed him.” I closed my eyes. “You know

what I mean.”

Mara remained silent.

“Do you remember anything else about last night? I’ve asked her twice, but Angie can’t remember who handed her the bottle of water, and it’s important we find out.”

Mara closed her eyes and took a deep breath. “There was a group of us sitting with the stepmothers. They’d been playing a game with the cousins, but it turned into more of a ‘let’s talk about how bad Angie’s dad is.’ He doesn’t sound like the greatest guy to be honest.

“Angie told them to settle down. Everyone laughed, though. It was all in fun. She was thirsty, and someone said, ‘Here,’ and handed her a bottle. But I faced the other way. I’d been thinking about eating one of the raspberry truffles Jasper had made. I’d already eaten about ten.”

“Really?” Those things were so rich. One was enough for me.

“Don’t judge. I’ve seen you with a bag of chips.” She opened her eyes and then winked at me.

I held up my hands. “No judgments about food. It was more that I was impressed you could eat so many.”

“I was queasy already, and I thought maybe because it was so warm in there. Angie tried to stand, but people had crowded around her. She was sweating too. I asked if she was okay, and then she handed me the water. She said I looked hot too, but the water tasted weird to her.

“I admit I gulped a bit, but it made me feel even queasier. Is that a word?”

I nodded.

“You know I don’t drink after people, but I was so thirsty.

“Who was in that room that might want to kill Angie?”

“If her soon to be father-in-law was around, I’d put money on him. Or her horrible bridesmaids.”

That was the first I’d heard about the bridesmaids. At the hen party, most of the women appeared to get along just fine. Nevertheless, it had been so crowded, and I’d spent most of my time eyeing the exits so I could run away.

“Which bridesmaids?”

Mara scrunched up her face. “I can’t remember their names. But the one

with the red hair and the super tall blond one. They were talking trash about how tacky Angie's wedding was at the dinner last night. Was that just last night? It seems weeks ago."

"It does. Did the bridesmaids say anything else about Angie—as in any reason they might want to cause her harm?"

Mara rubbed the bridge of her nose. "Just mean girl stuff. They think she's marrying up to make herself into something she's not. And then they were wondering when the hot brother would get there."

"She needs better friends."

Mara smiled sweetly. "I think that's why she's been hanging out with us so much. I don't understand why she has them in the wedding."

"I think most of them are cousins or friends of the family, and it's an obligation. At least, I remember her saying that one night when she was complaining about having to bring together the United Nations for her wedding."

"Oh, you're right. I remember her talking about that. I could try to get more info from them if you want. I mean, your Scooby Doo gang, as you like to call us, is here at the castle. We might as well help."

I patted her hand. "The only thing you need to do is rest. Your body has gone through trauma. You shouldn't have been working this morning."

She shrugged. "I feel so much better after that second IV. I'm still helping with the food prep, so at the very least, maybe I could talk to the kitchen staff, to see if anyone saw the victim."

"Ewan and his men have done that," I pointed out.

"Right, but they are police officers. You know how it is."

"Okay. Be careful, though. If there is another killer, we don't want to tip them off. Can I get you anything?" The staff had taken off the silver lids over the food, and the smells reminded me I hadn't eaten in a long time.

"I'm good," she said. "I tasted everything in the kitchen. I'm already full. You go ahead."

★ ★ ★

The red-headed bridesmaid stepped in line at the banquet, and I half ran across the room to stand behind her.

“This is quite the spread,” I said softly. Three different kinds of salads, four different entrée choices, and an array of fruit and veggies had been presented.

At home, most of the time the only reason I ever had anything healthy in the fridge to eat was because Abigail stocked it. I hadn’t liked that idea at first, but the food also fed her and her brother. It worked out for all of us since I often forgot to shop.

Back in Seattle, if I couldn’t order in from an array of restaurants, I didn’t eat. It was never a problem there because there were many twenty-four-hour restaurants.

In Sea Isle, there were a couple of pubs and various shops and Jasper’s bakery, but ordering something after eight at night—well, ordering anything to be delivered wouldn’t happen.

Ewan paid for the groceries as a part of my contract. More fine print I hadn’t seen. And Abigail kept the fridge full, one of the many reasons I appreciated her.

A few people gathered behind me in line. The plates were beautiful china, with tiny blue flowers and gold filigree circling the porcelain.

In all, there were about forty or so people, plus the staff, staying at the castle. None of us would go hungry anytime soon. It dawned on me that was why Ewan had panicked when he worried the food might be contaminated.

“It’s the least they can do since they are killing people off,” a woman sneered. Her yellow sweater was too tight, as if it tried to strangle her chest and arms. She piled a hefty amount of roast and gravy on her plate. “Did you find out who did it?”

“Me?”

“You’re working with the constable—at least that’s what I heard.”

Well, darn. So much for no gossip.

“I’m a doctor,” I said.

“Yes, but Marianne said you were questioning people with the constable. And that someone tried to kill Angie and some other woman too. Is that true?”

“Who is Marianne?”

She huffed. “The blond one,” she said drolly, as if I understood what that

meant.

“It could have been accidental,” I said.

Her eyebrows rose as she stared at me with piercing blue eyes.

“I’m Emilia,” I said.

“Tiffany,” she said and stuck out her elbow to bump with mine. “Did Angie tell you she stole her ex from me?”

I blinked.

I couldn’t imagine Angie stealing anything—let alone a man. It sounded like if she had, maybe she’d done Tiffany a favor.

Had this woman used Robbie to make Angie uncomfortable at her own wedding? And had she killed him for some reason?

“No, I hadn’t heard that story. I’m surprised you chose to come to the wedding—or to be in it for that matter—if you feel that way.” Totally stuck my foot in my mouth on that one.

She snorted. “I love Angie. Of course I’m here, but she isn’t the Miss Perfect everyone thinks.”

“Oh?” Angie might not be perfect, but she had a huge heart, was incredibly clever, and more importantly, she was my friend. I wouldn’t let someone be cruel, even behind her back.

She smirked. “We are friends. Have been since The Windsor School, when we were thirteen. We have a lot of history. That’s all I’m saying. She had a habit of taking other people’s boyfriends back then. I mean, they went after her, but still. There is a girl code.”

I couldn’t imagine Angie doing something like that. But she’d also dated a man who’d abused her, and lied to me about it.

Knowing the facts didn’t change the way I felt about her. No way I’d throw stones. There were parts of my past I had no desire to share with anyone. Not even my besties.

“Again, I’m confused why you—”

She waved a hand. “Oh please, that was years ago. Robbie was a real jerk. I can’t believe she put up with him for as long as she did. I’m happy for her. She caught herself a rich one.”

Tiffany was on my last nerve. “I think that’s a mutual catch. Angie is doing quite well for herself, and she’s awesome. She’s grown her business

and doesn't need a rich man to get by."

She put two dinner rolls on her plate. "Yeah, yeah. But it doesn't hurt to marry a hot guy with money. That's all I'm saying."

Full of jealousy and envy, that one. Two good motives for murder.

Toxic friends were not the kind any of us needed. Part of me felt sorry for Tiffany, who wasn't aware of how she wore her jealousy on her sleeve.

"Do you know anyone who might want to harm Angie or had anything against Robbie?"

"Oh, so it *is* Robbie. No one knew for sure."

Darn. I'd given away much more than I meant to. Ewan would be disappointed.

"He was heavy into drugs for a while. Especially after Angie broke it off with him. I'm not proud of it, but I did hook up with him for a few months right after that happened. I thought maybe I could help him, but I couldn't take it either. He had a temper."

Why would anyone date someone who did drugs?

Addiction wasn't something other people could fix. The person doing the drugs had to want to change.

Stop. No judging. I'd seen women like Tiffany in the ER; sometimes they died by the hands of their abusers.

"Do you know why he might have been here? Did he maybe want to hurt Angie?"

"Hard to say," she said. "He was pretty messed up when I left him. And that was months after the breakup. Someone said he went away and got clean. Maybe he wanted to get her back or something. He talked about that even when he was with me."

Poor Tiffany.

"He may have been rough, but he was also a romantic. He always said she was the love of his life, but we had fun. That is, until we didn't."

Yet, Tiffany had still gone out with him. My sorrow for this woman grew. Her negativity was a force field.

"Do you know of anyone who may have seen him in the last few years?"

She frowned. "Maybe check with Marianne. She is—I mean *was*—his cousin. If anyone would know what he was up to, she might. Out of all of us,

she's probably the main one grieving him."

Cousin? I had no idea he had family here.

Did Ewan know?

That changed the game a bit. Murder wasn't a game, but if I didn't look at it like Clue—it was sometimes a bit difficult for me to wrap my mind around the idea of people killing one another.

I saw the worst in the ER, but everything moved so fast, and I honed that separation between my patients and myself.

Being a coroner was different. I sometimes had to put my mind into the victim's; the minds of the people I interviewed; and when possible, the mind of the killer.

I'd never be a profiler, but I did try to understand motivations.

"Which one is she? You said the blond one." I waved out toward the room, which had filled up with more guests.

"Over there in the corner. With that horrid outfit—how can you miss her? Satin. Who wears *satin* to a casual mixer?"

Then Tiffany headed toward the bar, with her full plate.

Well, to the top of my list of suspects she went. Jealousy was a good motivation for wanting to kill someone's happiness. Tiffany was full of resentment as well.

Maybe she hadn't been so distant from Robbie. We'd heard he could be quite charming when he wasn't on drugs. They could have developed a scheme to disrupt the wedding, but then why kill him before he could try?

Tiffany flirted with the bartender and then laughed a little too loudly.

Yes, she was at the top of my list.

Chapter Six

Marianne sat down on one of the low sofas, her breasts nearly spilling out of the top of her mustard-colored dress. I'm not much on fashion, but the color made her look washed out and tired.

Tiffany's words had been unkind but weren't necessarily untrue.

Marianne's eyes were red. Perhaps she'd been mourning her cousin.

"Do you mind if I sit with you?" I asked. Then I smiled.

She glanced up at me.

"Who are you?" The question was sharp, and the sneer unmistakable.

I had serious doubts about why Angie had these people in her wedding. There was loyalty to friends—and then surrounding oneself with toxicity. She was so strong and capable. She never put up with guff from anyone.

Why allow these people to ruin her happy day?

"Dr. Emilia McRoy." I sat down across from her in a velvet chair.

"Oh, you're the one working with the constable."

The gossip in this place was rampant.

"I did the autopsy," I said.

"Well, I didn't kill anyone. So you can move along." She waved her fork at me.

"That isn't why I wanted to meet you." Yes, that was a lie. "I'm a friend of Angie's and wanted to give my condolences. I was told you were Robbie's cousin. I'm so sorry for your loss."

Marianne's brows drew together, and her throat worked hard to swallow. So she wasn't completely emotionless. "Thank you. You are the first person who—thank you."

"Is there anything I can do for you?"

“Uh.” It was if no one had ever been kind to her before, and she didn’t know how to answer. “I’m good. It’s hard, though.”

“I can’t even imagine what you must be going through. You’re sweet and brave for showing up tonight.”

She gave me a small smile. “I didn’t want to disappoint Angie by sulking in my room.”

“I’m sure she would have understood. How long have you known her?”

“Since we were tots,” she said. “Our parents used to live next door to one another—until her dad left. Which, if you ask me, was the best thing that ever happened to her. Her parents used to argue all the time. We were young, and I’d never seen anything like it. They didn’t seem to care who was around.”

“Oh?”

“We couldn’t have been more than four or five then. And their rows were epic. More than once she ran over to ours to get away from the yelling. When her dad left, we were all happier.”

“It must have been fun growing up with her, though.”

She pursed her lips together. “Back then, yes. Though trouble always found her—even then. But we did have a blast.”

I wondered what she meant by *back then*.

“You’re lucky. I’m not really in touch with my childhood friends.”

She sighed. “I thought, after what Robbie did, she might never speak to me again. But she didn’t blame me or our family. We don’t always agree, but she’s been a loyal friend.”

Marianne paused and then blinked.

“Do you think she or Damien killed Robbie? Part of me could almost understand. I mean was he killed? Everyone is saying murder, but the constable will only say he’s dead.”

“It could have been an accident,” I said. “Don’t believe the gossip. Until we can do more thorough tests, there is no way to tell.” That wasn’t exactly the truth, but I had to work hard to keep information close to my vest. “And to answer your question directly, no. They had alibis for the time of death. I believe you were at the party with Angie, right? Did you see her leave that night?”

“No, we were there to the end,” she said.

“Did your cousin perhaps hitch a ride with you?”

Her eyes widened. “I wouldn’t do that. You don’t think I’d hurt anyone, do you?”

I didn’t know. “Of course not. Only, we’re trying to determine who brought him out here. Who told him where the wedding was? As you know, the location was a big secret.”

She nodded.

“Since you’re his cousin, I thought perhaps he might have come with you, or contacted you to find out the details.”

“I’m—I wouldn’t do that to Angie. I didn’t tell him anything.”

She gave me a harsh look. I didn’t have much time before she lost patience with me.

“I don’t want to speak ill of the dead, but I’m guessing he was hard on Angie?” I stared down at my plate.

Marianne cleared her throat. “Yes. I’m still angry at him about that. Mainly because he wasn’t always mean. Before he—the drugs.” She took a tissue from the small glittery bag she carried, and then dabbed her nose. “Robbie was a sweetheart, but the drugs turned him into a demon.”

“As a doctor, I’ve witnessed many times how difficult addiction can be on a family.”

“It is. His mom and stepdad disowned him, and so did my parents. I was the only one who stayed in contact with him.”

“Did you know he’d be here?”

“At the wedding? God, no. Like I said, I would have talked him out of it. He’d gone to rehab in America, and this time it seemed to stick. When he came home, I put him up at mine for a few months while he got back on his feet.”

“How long ago was it that he returned home?”

She bit her lip. “A little over a year ago. He was dating someone else and seemed so happy. I don’t understand why he’d show up here. He was finally moving forward with his life and leaving the past behind. He’d even given up music. Said it wasn’t good for him to be in that environment. He had a great job in advertising in Glasgow. He was so clever and wrote that new jingle for Party Cakes.”

“Oh?” I had no idea what Party Cakes were.

“There was no reason for him to be here,” Marianne said softly, as if she were as confused as me. “A few weeks ago, he had to come to Edinburgh for a meeting with a new client. He stayed at mine for dinner. The old Robbie, the sweet one, was back. He told me he was happier than he’d been in a long time.

“Now he’s dead. I don’t understand any of this.”

She wasn’t alone.

“Is it possible he might have seen the invitation to the wedding at your home?”

Her brows drew together.

“Oh. I—do you think? I may have had some of the stuff out on one of the benches in my kitchen. I didn’t even—oh no.”

“It’s not your fault, but it may explain how he knew where the wedding would be.” Though not how he arrived. “Did you ever meet the woman he dated?”

Marianne shook her head. “He was in Glasgow by then, but he cared about her. He talked about how amazing she was. When we had dinner, he was excited about his parents, his mom and stepdad, forgiving him. They’d all gone to counseling. He was like a different person. Happy. That’s the way I’d describe him. Can you tell me—did he die from a drug overdose? That’s going to kill his mum.”

The not commenting on an ongoing case was burned into my brain. I’d told the other bridesmaid, Tiffany, too much already.

“I haven’t been able to run all the tests I’d like because of the weather,” I said.

Her shoulders slumped.

“But from what I’ve seen so far, I’d say no. I didn’t see any new needle marks.” Well, I shouldn’t have said that either. Argh. “But we are still in preliminary stages with the autopsy. Just don’t quote me on that or tell anyone, okay? I really can’t be sure until we run some more tests. Gossiping about him doesn’t help us get to the truth.”

“Do you think Robbie was murdered? I mean, be real. You can tell me. I’m his family.”

“I don’t know.” *Yes. Possibly.* We couldn’t find the bottle that delivered the poison, which bothered me a great deal.

This case was more confusing than ever.

“Do you remember the name of the girlfriend, by chance? The authorities will want to let her know, and they’ll probably want to question her.”

She pursed her lips. “I’ve been trying to remember if he ever mentioned her name. That’s odd, right? He promised to try and bring her the next time he visited. But for the last few hours I’ve wracked my brain for her name. Maybe they’ll find it in his things or at his apartment in Glasgow.”

Ewan and his men needed to check Marianne’s room.

I wanted to believe her.

“Was he close to anyone here, besides you? Someone must have brought him in.”

“No. I mean, Robbie used to be close to the Carthages, but they also wrote him off when he started living hard. There’s no way anyone in Angie’s family would have helped him. They argue, like too many monkeys in a barrel, but there is love there. They are super protective of her.

“And were Damien’s friends also friends of Robbie?”

Hmm.

“So, no one else here might have helped him gain access?”

“No.” She narrowed her eyes. “I’m not a suspect, am I?” She sat up straighter. “He was my bloody cousin. I didn’t kill him.”

But out of a sense of duty, she may have helped him. Maybe he didn’t tell her why he wanted to be here. He could have told her he’d been here to make amends.

“Of course not.”

“You’re trying to trick me. You pretend to be caring, but you just want information about Robbie.”

Her hand shook, and she set her glass down loudly on the table before storming off.

Ugh.

Everyone turned to look at us, and I shrugged.

I picked up the food I hadn’t eaten and moved back to the sofa, where

Mara sat.

I told her everything I'd just learned.

"Why would he try to kill Angie if he was moving on?" she asked.

"We can't be sure she was the one who was targeted. The bottles might have been mixed up or something." But I was certain, since no one else had tested positive, that Angie had been the one the killer or killers had been after.

"The wheels are turning again." She pointed at me. "Technically, someone in this room is a murderer. That's what you are thinking. Come on. Just say it. You said he would need help to get here. If he poisoned himself, where is the evidence?"

"No, someone cleaned up after him. They hid him somewhere before his death because Ewan said only a few of the guests and staff think they saw him. Everyone is confused whether it was Robbie or somebody named Mark. Abigail may have let that slip when she came to get some food for Tommy."

"I'm going to start calling *you* Vera," I joked.

"I take that as a compliment. I love Vera. She's good at what she does."

"True," I admitted. And now that I lived in Scotland, I understood the many layers the character wore. Even though she was in England, it was as cold and wet there as it was here.

"Motive—well, that's the worst part of this, right?" Mara whispered. "Angie and Damien would have a good reason for killing him. I can't imagine it, but as we've learned, people will do the unthinkable, if necessary, to protect those they love."

"True. I can't see her doing it—or him, though we don't know Damien as well."

"But you have to be objective. What I want to know is, if she did it, will you help her hide the proverbial shovel, or will you turn her over? You are, technically, on the law side of things." Her eyebrow went up.

"Where do you fall in that scenario?" I asked.

She snorted. "I'm totally hiding the shovel, and though I might feel guilty about it, I think you would find a way to get her out of it somehow. But if the anchor drops, you'd be on her side. I know that much.

"Remember, we had that Thelma and Louise conversation, and you

introduced us to that Earl song. We are the three amigas.” She winked.

“Let’s hope we don’t have to put ourselves in that position.” One could hope and pray, and I honestly didn’t think Angie could have murdered someone.

“It could have been those block-headed groomsmen. Rugby does something to their brains. If they thought Robbie was here to cause trouble, they would have had a square go.”

That meant beating him up. “He was poisoned, not beaten. If we have a murderer, he or she is clever.”

“That is not making me feel better.”

This was not how I thought Angie’s wedding days might go. I’d expected some weird party games. Maybe some wild friends and a lot of drinking—but not a murder.

Of the forty or so humans in the lounge, any one of them might be a murderer. It hit me. The families might have done anything for them.

“That look in your eyes is scaring me even worse,” she said.

I shrugged. “I thought I had some decent suspects, but it could be anyone.

“I keep forgetting to ask him, but why are so many of Ewan’s men here?” Mara asked. “Did he tell us that? My brain is still foggy.”

“Mr. Carthage insisted on having security,” Ewan said as he sat down across from us with a huge plate of food. “He was worried about being out in the middle of nowhere. They’re all sharing the apartment above the garage. Why?”

Mara snorted. “I just noticed two different ones from those last night at the door. That Mr. Carthage is a snobby jerk, but I feel better that your men are near.”

“Aye,” Ewan said. “Turned out to be a good thing.” He stuffed some sort of potato in his mouth. My stomach grumbled. After talking with Marianne, my food had gone cold.

“I said I wasn’t hungry before, but those potatoes look good,” Mara said. “I have my appetite back.”

“Do you want some?”

“Thanks,” she said. “Maybe if we survive eating, other people will try

the food. Ewan's staff has been cooking all day for these guests. We cannae let it go to waste."

She was right: only a few people had plates with food. Most of them were drinking.

I headed to the back of the room to join the queue. Some of the other guests followed me. I guess, if I thought the food was okay and wasn't worried about dying, it was good enough for them.

"Is my daughter going to be okay?" Angie's birth mom asked. I hadn't realized she was in front of me. Her mother had been furious that Angie wanted her dad to walk her down the aisle, but that was part of the truce.

Most of the time, the mother and daughter got along just fine, but the wedding had everyone in the family at loggerheads.

At least, that's what Angie had said when she tried to explain the politics of her wedding. Mara and I had been shocked by Angie's news that her relatives really did call a truce.

Seems the stepmothers were notorious for stirring up trouble.

Had one of the stepmothers tried to harm another one and Angie and Mara got in the way?

It was worth checking out.

"Yes, she's doing well," I said.

"Did Robbie try to murder my baby?" she whispered.

"I don't know," I said. That was the truth. "Angie is one in a million, with a heart of platinum. We don't know why he was here or what he might have been doing."

Her mother's eyes narrowed. "If someone is trying to hurt my baby, my guess is it's Damien's family. The boy is grand, but his parents gall me. I wouldn't put it past that old crank to hire someone to kill her. If he says one more cross word about her, I'll take him out myself. I despise her pa, but he wouldn't stand for that. If he were here, that is."

"Any word about that?"

"Why would I care, other than him not showing might upset my girl? I'm glad I don't have to lay eyes on that lying git."

Well, then. We knew how she felt about her ex, but her comment about Damien's dad made me wonder.

How far would he go to keep his son from marrying someone he believed wasn't worthy?

The problem was making a connection between his parents and the dead man. Robbie and Damien had been friends once, but it was a reach to think his father might have brought Robbie here on purpose.

Or was it?

Mr. Carthage was over near the bar; his wife, on the other side of the room.

Were they capable of murder?

Since I didn't know anything about them other than that he was a crusty fool, I put them on my suspect list.

Robbie was dead. No matter what his motives had been for being here, no one deserved to die like he had.

I glanced over to where Marianne had been sitting. Had she lied to me? Most criminals were adept liars. It wouldn't have been the first time a suspect tried misinforming authorities.

"I don't like to gossip, but I wasn't impressed by the parents," I said. "Anyone who doesn't love Angie isn't right in the head."

She smiled. "I like the way you think. We argue over most everything, but I could not love her more. This wedding is a bit wild, but I wanted it to be perfect for her. I won't let anything, or anyone, get in the way of that. If that old codger pulls anything, feel free to suspect me of his murder."

I laughed. I shouldn't have, but I couldn't help it. I loved how she was so fiercely protective of her daughter.

As she scooped green beans onto her plate, she didn't see me staring at her. Could she have killed Robbie? Poison was most often used by women. I'd read a statistic about that in some of the forensic research I'd done.

If I was forced by Ewan, and Sea Isle, to be a coroner, I at least needed some working knowledge of crime scenes and types of murders. It turned out there were a few thousand books on the subjects.

Most nights when I wasn't watching mysteries with Mara, Jasper, Abigail, and sometimes Angie, I was reading criminal forensics and criminal psychology.

People were fascinated by murders and serial killers. As an addict of UK

book and television mysteries, I was no different. Some of the manuals were quite technical, but no less fascinating.

The one thing I'd discovered from those books was the phrase: KISS (keep it simple, stupid). If it looked like the butler did it and the evidence pointed to that—more often than not, he had.

Only this case wasn't so cut and dried. I didn't know if Robbie had been murdered. We had no idea why he'd been here. Had it really been to stop the wedding?

Argh. I suspected that, yes. But as Ewan would say, the evidence wasn't there. At least, not yet.

My friends had been poisoned. Someone at that party had handed them a bottle with poison in it. Again, it could have been an accident. But why just them? What were the odds they'd get the tainted bottle?

Abigail had found fibers on Robbie's clothing, but we had no way of testing for DNA. Even if we found human skin cells, they weren't necessarily from the person guilty of killing him.

He could have borrowed the clothing from one of the valets.

I much preferred assuming things. This gathering evidence to solve a case was annoying.

"Did you have any reason to want Robbie gone?"

She huffed. "He raised a hand to my daughter. He's lucky he lived as long as he did. No one touches my Angie like that."

That was a fierce momma bear, and I didn't blame her.

It was difficult to imagine this woman, with perfectly coiffed hair and Christian Louboutin heels, killing someone.

She wouldn't have harmed Angie and Mara.

"I'll be honest. If I'd seen him, I'd have shoved him outside and locked the door. Better yet, shoved him off one of the balconies. That's one thing Angie's steps and I agree on. Anyone who tries to hurt her again, they will die."

Since I felt the same way about Angie, Mara, Abigail, Tommy, and Jasper, I couldn't fault her. I'd taken an oath to do no harm, but I'd never had friends like them.

If pushed, I'm not sure what I might do to protect them.

“That boy was bad news from the start,” she said as we moved down the line. Mara’s plate was piled high, but I’d forgotten to put anything on mine. I grabbed some green beans and chicken piccata.

“Do you know much about him, other than that he dated Angie and was mean to her?”

“When he was a child, he was fine. But he grew up to be a completely disrespectful git. Wasn’t just me either. Her dad hated him. If he were here, he’d have taken the boy out. No question about it.

“Back then she couldn’t see he wasn’t the sweet boy she grew up with. He ran with a bad crowd, got into drugs. It wasn’t until he tried to isolate her from us that she saw him for who he was. But she still couldn’t quite pull away—until Damien.”

“I understand he was best mates with her ex.” Ewan had taught me it was best to get the same story from different people. It made it easier when deducing the actual truth.

“Aye, and two men couldn’t be more different,” she said. We’d reached the end of the line. “Damien very nearly worships her,” she said. “When they first met, he dressed rough and had long hair. I worried that we’d be going through the same thing with him as we had with Robbie.

“But he was so lovely, even then. Damien’s always been polite and thoughtful with our family. All the steps love him as well. He’s been given our stamp of approval. Not that Angie cares about that, mind you.

“He’s so clean cut, it’s tough to imagine what he was like five years ago when she first brought him around. They are opposites and a good match at the same time. I could not imagine a better husband for her.”

I hadn’t spent much time with Damien, but I’d been around him enough to see how he treated Angie. He would have done anything for her.

Maybe he’d killed his former friend to protect her. Damien was lithe and athletic, but he was also tall and formidable in his own way.

If he were guilty, I’d understand—but could I let my friend marry a murderer?

Don’t get ahead of yourself.

“Thank you,” I said.

“You let me know if you need anything, darlin’. Me and the steps will do

whatever is necessary to protect our girl.”

“Noted.” I liked Angie’s mom, but I wouldn’t want to get on her bad side.

I carried the plates across the room and handed Mara hers. She stared down at the piles of food and then back at me.

“I wasn’t sure what you were in the mood for, so I picked up a little of everything.”

My plate held a small new potato, the green beans, a bite of chicken piccata, and a roll. Oh well. At least it was something.

“What were you talking about with Angie’s mom?” Ewan asked.

I dropped the food on my fork back on the plate.

“What?” he said.

“I’ve never seen you be this nosy,” I said. “Why would you care that I was talking to her?”

“Did she say anything pertinent to the case?”

I sighed. “If you must know, she told me about the ex. How he exhibited classic abuse behavior by trying to isolate Angie away from her friends and family. And she thinks the world of Damien.”

“You have that look in your eye.” Mara frowned.

“It’s just my brain working out a few things.”

“Theories?” Ewan leaned forward in his chair. His plate, which had been full before, was clean and sat on the round table next to him.

“Are you going to share yours?” I asked before sticking a forkful of potatoes in my mouth.

“Yes,” he said.

“Wait. What?” I coughed.

“This is getting good. It’s like a real-life whodunnit.” Mara smiled. “You first, Em.”

“Let’s keep in mind there is a dead man in the dungeon,” I said. “Technically, it is real life.”

Mara scrunched up her face. “Sorry. You’re right.”

“Wine cellar,” Ewan corrected. “It hasn’t been a dungeon in at least a hundred years or so. And even then, my family only jailed and tortured people when necessary. We live by a code.”

“Absolutely necessary?” I had so many questions about that. How many people had the McGregor family tortured down there?

“Focus, Doc. What do you know so far?” he asked.

“The majority of people here feel the same way about Angie that we all do. Maybe we should be looking at those who don’t.”

“Like Damien’s father?” Mara whispered.

I nodded. “As well as the mother and brother. What if one of them brought Robbie here on purpose? Marianne said Robbie was close to all the Carthages until he got into drugs.

“Then there is Tiffany, who dated Robbie after Angie left him.”

“What?” Ewan’s jaw dropped.

“She didn’t tell you?”

“No. She must have forgotten that part.”

“And you probably already know Marianne is his cousin, since you and your men talked to everyone. Did you find anything in the rooms you searched?”

“I did know about Marianne, and she is on the list of suspects, as is Tiffany now.”

“I have them at the top of mine. But if they were working with Robbie ...”

“Then why kill him?” Ewan finished.

“Might have been an accident,” I said. “But if that’s how they planned to kill Angie, why would he drink it?”

“So you think he came with the intent to kill her?”

I shrugged. “He had to have help, though. There was only one bottle with the antifreeze in it at the hen party. And someone just happened to hand it to Angie? There must be an accomplice who made sure she picked up that bottle.

“Those bridesmaids were in the room at the time.”

“The person had to be a woman at the hen party. There weren’t any guys there,” Mara said.

Loud voices rang out behind me. Someone wasn’t happy.

I glanced around the room.

An argument had broken out, in the corner of the room, with some of the

groomsmen, but I was at an odd angle, and I couldn't see who all was involved.

Ewan popped up, as if to stop them, but a loud crack, like a bomb, went off, and people screamed.

Mara and I might have been some of those people.

The castle trembled and everything went dark.

Chapter Seven

The rumbling intensified, the windows rattled, and the sound of a freight train hurt my ears. Mara reached out and grabbed my arm, which was understandable but still made me jump in the darkness.

“Sorry,” she whispered.

“It’s okay.”

“Everyone, stand still,” Ewan urged loudly. “The lights will be back on soon. We have plenty of generators—they only need time to turn on.”

“What’s going on?” I asked. “It sounded like a bomb went off.”

“Avalanche, probably a little higher up on the mountain,” Ewan answered.

“Avalanche?” a woman screamed hysterically. That was not me, although I was right there with her on the terror.

“We’re fine,” Ewan said in that deep baritone of his. “Be still. Do not panic. I don’t want anyone tripping in the dark. We’ve safeguards outside—you are safe. If you stay still, everything will be fine.”

Without the lights, it was impossible to see outside, but the rumbling stopped.

“Angie,” Damien bellowed.

“What happened?” Mara asked anxiously. “Where is Angie?”

The lights flickered and then came back on inside the huge room. The outside lights showed snow sliding down the mountain. It wasn’t the huge chunks I’d expected. Only small bits traveling fast.

“Can you see Angie?” I asked Ewan.

Ewan shook his head.

The voices around us tittered with nervousness, and the rumbling

continued outside, though not as loud.

“The snow is piling up fast, but we’re safe.” Ewan used his authoritative, no-nonsense voice. “No need to worry. There are reinforced stone walls and trenches around the castle to divert anything coming down the mountain.”

I’d only seen avalanches on television. Until now.

The idea of piles of snow coming toward us unnerved me. I shivered.

“Doc, we need your help.” Ewan’s voice was far away. He’d moved from where we were when the lights went out, and I had a tough time finding him in the swarms of people milling about. There was a crowd gathered near the coffee and hot chocolate bar.

“Oh my.” Angie’s mom cried out. “She’s dead. My baby is dead.”

My chest tightened, and I found it difficult to breathe. Still, I was across the room before I even realized I was off the couch.

“Move,” I said, and I didn’t bother altering my tone. “Move,” I said again. The crowd didn’t budge.

Angie? Where are you?

I tried to plow through the crowd, but no one was moving.

“Ewan!” I yelled.

“Move back,” he said. “Let the doctor through.”

The crowd parted. Angie was on the floor in a pool of blood.

No! I wanted to scream, but my instincts kicked into high gear. “My kit is on the table in my room.”

“I’ll get it,” Ewan replied.

I knelt and put my hand to her neck. Her pulse was strong.

Damien was on the other side of her. “Babe, please wake up.”

“I need towels.” The wound had to be on the back of her head. After checking her neck carefully, to make sure it wasn’t broken, I turned her head to the right.

“Light. I need more light.” People used their phones to shine light down.

The gash in Angie’s head wasn’t as bad as I’d first imagined. Head wounds tend to bleed a great deal. She’d have a massive headache, but the wound wouldn’t even need stitches. Once I cleaned and bandaged it, she’d be okay.

Except for the fact she was unconscious.

“What happened?”

“I had my arm around her, and she slid down,” Damien said. “She was at an odd angle, and I thought I caught her before she hit her head. But she’s bleeding. Please tell me she’s okay.”

Angie’s mom squeezed her hand. “Tell me she’s alive,” she cried. Tears streamed down her face.

“Yes,” I said. “She’s alive. She’ll be fine.

There was another rumble and the windows rattled again.

The lights flickered off again.

Women screamed around us.

Thanks to the flashlight apps, I could still see.

“Everything is fine,” Ewan said loudly. “The generators have kicked in.”

He pushed through the crowd and placed my kit beside me. He must have run at record speed. “Tell me what you need.”

“Just open it,” I said as I took one of the towels someone handed me.

I quickly grabbed what I needed to clean the wound.

“How is she?” he whispered.

The windows rattled again. Then there was more screaming.

The screaming irked my nerves, and my hands shook. I took a deep breath.

“Get these people out of here,” I said.

“Can’t. We need to find out what happened to Angie first.”

It hit me: he thought someone had tried to hurt her again.

“Give me your flashlight—I mean torch.”

“Everyone, sit,” he barked. “No one leaves the room until I say so.”

The crowd didn’t move. “Now!” he bellowed.

“How dare you order us around.” Damien’s father’s nasty tone came through the crowd.

“I’ll help her—you handle that.” Mara sat next to me on the floor, directing her remarks to Ewan.

He stood. “Mr. Carthage, please sit down before I have my men take you to the dungeon for questioning. Your soon-to-be daughter-in-law has been injured. I’d like to speak to you as soon as we finish with her care.”

There were gasps around the room.

“I’ll have your job, Constable,” the other man bit out angrily. “I’ll be speaking to your boss.”

“This is my castle, and I’m the laird. I am the boss.”

If I hadn’t been so worried about Angie, I might have cheered for him.

“The wound is higher on her head. Did she hit it on the floor, or did it happen before?” Mara asked.

I quickly assessed the situation once I had the wound somewhat clean. The small gash was higher on her head; Mara was right.

“She didn’t get it hitting the floor.”

“Wait—what?” Damien’s voice croaked. “Someone hit her?”

People around us gasped again.

“Ewan,” I grumbled.

“On it,” he said. “Everyone please be seated. Mr. Carthage, perhaps you’d like to tell me where you were in the room when the lights went out.”

“I want my lawyer,” the other man said.

“Take a seat then; it may be a while.”

There was another loud pop and more shaking. At least, this time the lights stayed on, which wasn’t saying much with the club-like feel of the lounge. The phones’ lights had been moved away, and mood lighting was not appropriate for examining a patient.

I checked her eyes. Her pupils weren’t dilated. At least we had that going for us.

I prayed there hadn’t been brain damage.

I ran my fingers through her updo, and there was a small hematoma growing. I gently pushed on it and blood gushed out.

“I hate the blood part of this,” Mara said.

I handed her a towel. “Put pressure on it while I check the rest of her to make sure she didn’t hurt herself when she fell.”

Her mother moved out of the way, while I moved down Angie’s body. It was weird to touch my friend in this way, but I had to make sure she hadn’t broken anything.

“Why isn’t she waking up?” Damien whispered. His tear-stained cheeks said it all. “Angie, luv, please wake up. Please.”

Her eyes fluttered open. “What are you doing?” she asked Mara, who

was now holding pressure at the top of her head.

Angie sat up, before we could stop her, and rubbed her head. “Bloody hell. Someone hit me.”

“I think you fainted, luv,” Damien said. “I tried to catch you.”

“Nay. I felt something hit the back of my head, and then I blacked out.” She frowned. “I didn’t faint. I’m not that type of woman.”

I pursed my lips. “I believe you.”

I glanced behind Damien. There was something metal by one of the flower-draped screens.

“Don’t move,” I said. “You took a good hit, and you need to give yourself some time.”

Damien scooped her up off the floor. “I’m taking her to our room. Are you coming with us?”

I’d just said for her not to move, but it was too late. Was she safe with him? Her beloved groom had been the one nearest to her, but there were still tears in his eyes as he held her close.

He stared down at her so lovingly, it was difficult to believe he’d cause her harm.

“Keep her propped up and don’t let her fall asleep. I’ll be there in a bit. Mara, keep pressure on the wound.”

“Did she faint?” Abigail asked from behind me. “Henry came and got me in case you needed help.”

“She said she was hit, and I believe her,” I whispered.

Abigail helped me stand up. I went over to the flowered screen and stared down at the piece of metal I’d seen. It was a small mallet with blood and hair on it. Purple hair.

“What can I do?” Abigail asked.

“I need an evidence bag.” I pointed down at the ground.

Her eyes went wide. “Holy Mother.”

“I know.” I took pictures of the area, though it was still dark in the room. “Have Henry cordon this area off and take fingerprints. Maybe we’ll get lucky, and there will be shoe prints, as well.”

We made quick work of placing the mallet in the bag. Most of the guests had either wandered off or were gathered near the windows, with the staff,

checking out the surroundings.

The outside lights had come back on. The snow was piled in tall mounds all around the castle, and I worried about anyone who might have been outside during all of that.

I stuffed the bag with the mallet into my kit. I had a fingerprint kit, but Henry could handle it.

Abigail guided me upstairs to Angie's room. Through the thick door the sounds of an argument came through.

Abigail and I looked at each other and made faces.

Why are they fighting?

I knocked so hard on the door, my knuckles hurt.

The yelling stopped, and a few seconds later, the door opened. Damien's usually perfect hair stood on end, and he scowled at me.

"Maybe you can get through to her." He stomped to the foot of the bed and sat there with his arms crossed, like a small, petulant child.

Their suite was much like the one I stayed in, but the colors were gold and white.

Angie was paler than usual, and the lights were much brighter in here.

Mara sat next to her, with the bloody towel on Angie's head. She rolled her eyes and shrugged, as if saying, "*Awkward.*"

"Let's take a look at your eyes now that you're awake," I said, ignoring the tension in the room. Angie didn't appear to have a concussion, which was surprising, and the hematoma had stayed about the same. The bump was more toward the top of her skull, as if the mallet had come down wielded by someone taller—or with a long reach.

"I need you to make her rest," he said. "I feel horrible for letting her faint. Someone tried to poison her, and she should have stayed in bed."

"She didn't faint," I said. He quite obviously hadn't been listening when we'd all been on the floor. Angie had said someone hit her. Maybe he didn't believe her, but I did.

He turned to face us. "What?"

"I'm certain someone hit her from behind with a blunt kitchen instrument. You probably kept her from being hurt further by hitting the floor hard."

“I-I—what?” Angie said. I’d never seen her at such a loss for words.

“Someone tried to hurt her? Again? I’m going to kill them. Whoever it is, they are dead.” Damien jumped up and paced. “I could see her ex doing something like this, but he’s not alive. Why? Why is this happening?” He ran a hand through his hair. Then he shoved me aside somewhat roughly, to take Angie’s hand.

“Babe, I’m so sorry. I was right there, and I didn’t protect you.”

Angie touched his cheek. “Please apologize to Em and let her finish. Poor Mara’s arm is going to fall off if she must sit like this all night.”

Damien glanced at Mara and then over at me. His face contorted.

“Oh. Oh, I’m so sorry, Doctor. I—wasn’t thinking.” He moved away quickly.

“Sorry,” Angie mouthed.

I shook my head.

“Let’s get her in the bathroom,” I said.

Before we could help, Damien swooped in and carried her into the bathroom, which was more like its own suite. There were cushioned benches and plush chairs.

“Sit her down there in front of the vanity. And then why don’t you grab her some clean clothes, Damien.”

Her cute outfit was covered in blood.

“Right. Are you sure?” he asked.

“Yes,” Angie said. “I want my llama onesie, please. And some of Jasper’s chocolate raspberry truffles and some macarons. If someone is trying to hurt me, I’m going to eat what I want.”

“I don’t want to leave you.” His voice was hoarse.

“I’ll be fine. Em and Abigail are the best at what they do. Go, please. I’m starving. But bring the clothes first.”

Abigail had rolled my kit in, and Mara sat on the side of the tub while I worked on Angie’s head.

“Stitches?” Angie asked.

“No. It’s fairly small. I’m going to glue it and use a waterproof plaster. Otherwise, we’d have to shave this part.”

“No,” she, cried out. “No shaving. I mean, at least, not there. Maybe a

little on the sides, but not on the top of my head. I'll look like one of those monks with the rope belts."

I smiled. "I've got this," I said. "Don't worry. We do need to keep an eye on the bump forming, but we'll be talking about that in a minute."

We cleaned her up, and once we had her situated, we moved her back to the bed.

"Do you remember anyone being near you before this happened?"

She closed her eyes. "We were making the rounds and trying to visit with everyone before we ate. I wanted to get a feel for whether people were okay with the wedding continuing—you know, after everything that happened with Robbie."

We nodded in unison.

"I've been having doubts—not about marrying Damien, but about doing it right now. We've all worked so hard on this wedding. We've spent so much money—not that it matters. I mean a man died. But I've wondered what the families thought."

"What did you find out?" Mara asked.

"That everyone thinks we should get married. They see Robbie as some kind of villain. I'm not sure they are wrong.

"Ouch, Em—that hurts."

"Necessary," I said. I finished taping her head.

She took a deep breath.

"Except for Damien's parents. They would be ecstatic if everything was canceled."

"Which makes them the prime suspects," Mara blurted out.

Angie gasped. "What? No. Is that what Ewan says?"

"No." I glared at Mara. "Besides, even if he thought it, he wouldn't comment on an ongoing investigation." The last few words we all said in unison.

Angie shook her head and then winced.

"Do you want something for the pain?"

"No more drugs or medicine. I need to keep my wits about me."

She squeezed her hands together. "Do you think someone really wants me dead—at my wedding? Why would they wait until now? Why not run me

over on the street? Or ... trip me down the stairs?" Her voice croaked on the last word.

Abigail and Mara had pulled chairs closer to the bed. I reached over and took her hand in mine.

"I don't know, Angie. They hurt you in a room full of people. So we know they are bold and clever."

She bit her lip. "Of all the things I thought might go wrong, the caterer's, the cake—don't tell Jasper I said that—I never imagined someone would die. Let alone that the person would be one of my exes.

"And now someone wants to kill me." Tears slid down her cheeks. I wiped them away with my thumbs.

"My in-laws are not my biggest fans, but murderers?"

"We don't know that's the case," I said. "The only thing we know is how Robbie died. But we don't know if someone poisoned him. It really could have been an accident."

"You don't think it is, though, do you?" she asked me.

I shrugged. "I meant it earlier—I don't know. What happened to you and Mara could have been an accident. I will say this for your in-laws: they weren't in the room when someone handed you poison at your hen party."

Her eyes went wide.

But they were the most likely suspects to bring Robbie into the game. "I'm going to ask again. Do you remember who was close before the lights went out?"

"There were several people in line to get food. Briony and Ethan were flirting over the potatoes. Mrs. Carthage was behind them and staring at me with a weird look on her face. Not disdain or meanness—more like she was worried about something."

That was interesting.

"Damien's brother, Caleb, was behind his mom," she continued. "He was chatting up Deirdre, one of my bridesmaids, which is funny."

"Why is that?"

"Men are not her type." She smiled. "But I think she was having him on, because she smiled at him and laughed at something he said."

"Anyone else?"

“It’s a blur. Same as the night before with the water. Someone handed it to me, but I was in a crowd. It could have been anyone.”

I took out the small notebook and pen I’d been carrying around. As ideas or suspects rolled around in my brain, I’d make notes.

“Let’s narrow down the crowd. Think about what happened right before you accepted the water.”

“We’d been playing games, and my butt was numb. I was about to get up, and then Marianne told a story about a wedding she’d been to in India, where the bride and groom met in person for the first time at the ceremony. They are still married. Isn’t that amazing?”

“Yes,” Abigail said. “Do you know if they used a matchmaker?”

“I don’t know,” Angie said. “I’ve heard of people meeting online, but can you imagine getting married, and you’ve never—well, anyway, Damien and I may walk in different worlds, but at least we know we are compatible.”

The four of us could talk for hours about anything, so I had to get everything back on track. “Your butt was numb, but you ended up staying at the table to hear the story.”

“Right. Mara was next to me. No, wait. We did stand up. We tried to fan ourselves with napkins because of the stuffy air. Remember?” She pointed to Mara, who nodded.

“I said, ‘I’m so thirsty.’ And then someone said, I’ll get you something.”

“Do you remember the voice?” I asked.

She closed her eyes. “The music was loud. Other than that it was female, not really. Wait.”

We all leaned forward.

“The hand. She had long painted fingernails—the same color as the rest of the women in my wedding party. We all went for a spa day together. Whose hand was that?”

“Any other distinguishing marks on the hand? Was it young or old? Any jewelry?” I asked.

She breathed deeply. “It wasn’t wrinkly. This means someone in my wedding party is trying to kill me. Who would do that?”

“Again, it may not have been on purpose.”

“I don’t think you believe that,” Angie said. “Do you?”

“I’m not a detective. I’m trying to gather evidence and proof. But it’s quite difficult with the man who would be our main suspect dead.”

“I still can’t believe he’s gone. I feel bad for not mourning him more. That’s why I’m so conflicted over the wedding. Who gets married in a situation like this? Horrible, narcissistic people, that’s who.”

“Stop,” we all said at the same time.

“You are many things, my friend, but none of those. You are loving and caring. That guy hurt you. The only way you should feel is glad that he’s gone,” Mara said.

“She’s right,” Abigail added.

“Angie, whatever his reasons for being here, they weren’t good. Ewan would say I have no proof of that, but it is what I believe. There is no reason you should mourn a man who hurt you like that, or who possibly tried to kill you. Our friends are right.

“If you want the wedding to continue, then it should.”

She blew out a breath. “My head is so muddled. I don’t know what to think anymore. Mara, did you see anything?” she asked.

Mara shook her head. “At the hen do? I took the water from you, but I didn’t see who gave it to you.”

“Angie, did you see where she left the bottle?” I asked. “We haven’t been able to find the tainted one.”

“On the table, the long one under the window,” Angie said.

“That’s what I thought,” Mara added. “I started feeling weird quickly. I decided to get some fresh air, and then I found you in the garden.”

“How about you, Angie? Any quick symptoms?”

“Not that I remember. My cheeks were flushed. I felt tired and woozy, but I hadn’t slept for days. I’ve been so worried about everything going right. Ha. I thought the weather or food might be an issue.”

“Let’s stay on that night. Do you remember Mara leaving?”

“Yes. I was jealous because I couldn’t leave my own party. I was there until the end. I didn’t look at a clock, but it was probably around three or so. It was maybe about an hour after I went to bed that I threw up a few times. I just assumed it was nerves and not eating enough.”

As if on cue, the door slammed open, and we jumped.

My nerves were so raw that I jumped at every noise since we'd arrived at the castle. I wasn't normally like that. In the ER, loud noises happened all the time. But I was low on sleep, and the castle was beautiful but creepy.

I didn't believe in ghosts, but one could imagine there might be a few hanging out in the dungeon or down one of the long halls.

Damien entered with a huge silver tray of food. "I brought a bit of everything," he said.

"Babe, someone in our wedding party is doing this," Angie said. "I remembered a hand, and it wore the same nail polish as my bridesmaids, the steps, and my cousins. Can you believe that? Well, there are women from your side too, who were there."

His face went pale. "I don't understand what nail polish has to do with anything."

Angie did her best to explain.

"Are we still blaming my family for this?" He sounded more curious than angry. He put the tray down in the middle of the bed and then sat close to Angie. He poured her a cup of hot cocoa and then offered us some.

"What do you think about all of this?" I asked. "Is there anyone in attendance who would want to hurt either of you? Be brutal."

They glanced at each other, but Angie shook her head.

"My parents aren't exactly happy about our marriage," Damien said. He took Angie's hands in his. "But they wouldn't resort to something like this."

"He's right." Angie sat up straighter. "They are more likely to say rude things in public. Violence isn't really their style."

Damian put his arms around her. "Babe, I thought they'd come around. I know Mom has. After spending time with you the last few months, she gets why you are so perfect for me. She told me when I went down to get you some food."

Though they were wealthy enough to have hired someone.

"She did?" The surprise on Angie's face made me smile.

He nodded. "She said, Dad doesn't like anyone to be happy. That she would handle him. We needn't worry anymore."

"I saw her glancing at me before someone hit me. Maybe she saw whoever it was?"

“I’ll ask her,” I said.

“Doesn’t she need to rest?” Damien asked. “I don’t want her to worry about all of this right now. I just want her to get bloody well.”

“Angie, your soon-to-be husband is right.” I stood. “You need rest. However, you need to wake her up every few hours just in case she has a concussion. I’m not seeing any signs of it, but we need to make sure.

“If she starts to run a fever, has nausea, or seems confused, come and get me. Don’t wait.”

“Got it.” He followed us to the door.

“And do not leave her side,” I said. “Something strange is going on here, and until we get to the bottom of it, you two stick together. If anything happened to either of you, I’d never forgive myself.”

Angie sat back against the bed. “None of this is your fault, Em. You’re the reason Mara and I are alive and still have kidneys. I can’t imagine what would have happened to us if you hadn’t been here.

Angie turned to her fiancé. “Everyone we talked to tonight told me we should carry on with our wedding,” she said. “I take back what I said before. I’m grateful to be alive, and I want to marry you, Damien.”

“Luv, you know marrying you is what I want, but maybe we should ...”

“Do not finish that sentence.” Angie’s jaw tightened.

Darn, we hadn’t moved quick enough.

“The person doing this is an evil bully, and we will not give them what they want. We are going through with this wedding. I’m not being one of those bridezillas, I promise. It’s more about not allowing some jerk to ruin our day.”

“Luv, someone has tried to kill you twice. I—I can’t lose you.”

“You won’t. I’m still alive, right? Obviously, the universe wants us together, and we’re not about to go against the powers that be.” Angie had that determined look on her face, the one that had made her a successful businesswoman and one of the best friends I’d ever had.

“Lock the door,” I said. “No more arguing. The stress isn’t good for either of you. I mean it. Do not accept any food or drink unless you’ve picked it out of the kitchen yourself. If you need something, let me, Abigail, or Mara know. Understood?”

They nodded in unison.

“You’ll help us make the wedding happen?” Angie smiled.

She and Mara had been there for me when I needed them most. And Abigail and Tommy. Well, all of them really. Even the annoying Ewan.

“Yes.”

But first, I had to find a killer.

Chapter Eight

Abigail had gone to check on Tommy in the carriage house, and Mara headed to the kitchen to check on breakfast prep. It had been a long day, but I wanted to see if I could pull fingerprints from the meat cleaver.

I'd run into Henry in the hallway. He was still busy interviewing the guests, to see if they could find out who had been near Angie when she was hit. I told him to ask Mrs. Carthage if she had seen anyone behind her.

Before I went to our makeshift lab downstairs, where the big kit was, I grabbed my puffy coat from our room and then headed toward the kitchen.

"Where are you goin', lass?" Caleb asked as he sauntered down the hall. "Would you like to share a nightcap?"

I couldn't remember the last time someone had asked me for a drink.

Oh, wait. Yes, I did. The first man I'd dated after my husband died had been a killer. As in: murdered people and tried to kill me.

While I had respect for older women who dated much younger men, I had a feeling Caleb only wanted a warm body. That and he smelled of whiskey and regret.

"Busy," I said. "But maybe you can help me with something?"

He stumbled a bit as he approached me. "Anything, lass." He slurred the last word, and it sounded more like "lash."

"Do you have any idea why someone would want to hurt Angie?"

He snorted with laughter.

My eyebrow may have gone up an inch or so. "I don't find the fact that someone is trying to kill one of my best friends funny."

He waved a hand as if that was even funnier.

I crossed my arms. "Why are you laughing? Angie could have died from

poison or the injury to her head. Where were you, exactly, when she was hit?"

He cleared his throat. "You can't think that I—" He snorted again. "You've got it all wrong. Golden boy marrying a punk rocker is the best thing that has happened to me in years. Dad has been so angry with my brother, he's been off my back." He laughed again. "When bribery didn't work, he tried to blackmail Damien into giving up his bride."

"You're joking."

"Nay. Ask him. Dad threatened to take away the keys to the kingdom, and my brother told him to stick them up his arse. I got to see that one at a family dinner. Didn't know my bro had it in him. Dad's been a fumin' mess ever sense. It's been glorious."

Damien's father had threatened him. If he'd do that to his own son, what might he do to Angie?

Mrs. Carthage might have been covering for her husband earlier, or she was clueless to her husband's machinations. She'd told Ewan they were in their room all night. But had they been?

Damien had mentioned canceling the wedding. He'd said it was so that whoever was trying to kill his bride would stop—but was he afraid his father might succeed with an evil plan?

Maybe his father had made good on his blackmail threats.

"Is there anyone else who might want to stop the wedding?"

"A host of my brother's exes. But I don't think any of them are in attendance. Except for one, and I think she's a lesbian now. Deirdre wasn't interested in hanging out with me. I'd been doing her a favor because I usually never bother with my brother's castoffs."

Such a charmer, this one.

"I can't imagine why she'd turn you down." I grinned. "If you'll excuse me, I have more important things than you to deal with."

I wasn't normally so rude, but it didn't matter. I don't think he understood what I said. I'd almost reached the kitchen when a woman stepped out with a tray.

I nearly bumped into her, but stopped and leaned against the wall. "Sorry," I said, reaching out to help her keep the tray level.

“Oh.” The crystal and assorted dishes clattered. “I dinnae see ya there,” one of Angie’s stepmothers said. I still couldn’t remember all their names. Only that the youngest was the one currently married to her dad. I think this one was the second wife, or maybe the third.

“That looks good.” I stared down at the tray.

“Aye, I thought Angie and her beau might need something to eat.”

I couldn’t stop my eyes from narrowing, but I forced myself to smile.

“Angie is resting. I just came from there. Damien had just brought her a tray.”

“Oh.” She frowned. “I just love that girl so much, and I hate that all of this is happening.” Her disappointment appeared genuine. “I put together some of her favorites. If you’re worried that I’ve done something to the food, a woman named Mara checked it over. She and the man who owns this castle have been overseeing everything that happens in the kitchen.”

“I’m sure it’s all fine, but Angie needs her rest. I’ll let her know you were thinking of her.”

She glanced down at the tray. “I guess I’ll have some wee snacks for later.”

“I like the way you think.”

She frowned again. “Is it true about Robbie? I never liked that boy. He was bad news from the start. Do ya think he may have killed himself on purpose, to ruin the wedding?”

I might have thought that if there hadn’t been someone else with him in the tower. And if someone hadn’t hurt Angie an hour or so ago.

“I’m running tests,” I said. “Do you have any idea who else might want to hurt Angie?”

“Not a soul. How could anyone not love our wee lass? She was the best thing about my marriage to her father. I adore Angie and her ma. After I found out he was cheating on me, I had nowhere to live. Angie convinced her mother to take me in until I could find my feet. Who does that? Takes in an ex’s soon-to-be ex. Did I say that right?” She laughed. “That stepdaughter of mine is an apple that didn’t fall far from the tree. Thankfully, she takes after her ma and is nothing like her da.”

There was no mistaking the kindness and love in her voice. I glanced at

the hands holding the tray. They were slightly wrinkled, and she had a mole on her left hand. I put that information on a shelf in my brain to write down in my notebook later.

“Well, thank you for looking after our girl.” She lifted the tray a little higher. “We’ll be more on guard now. It’s been a long day, but hopefully tomorrow will be better.”

“Hopefully,” I said.

She wandered down the hall, and I mentally checked her off my suspect list. While she had no love for the ex, it was obvious how much she cared for Angie.

I rounded the corner to find Mara, Abigail, and Ewan, deep in conversation. The kitchen was huge, as in I’d seen hotel kitchens that were smaller, and it was beautiful, with concrete countertops, or “benches” as they called them here; navy cabinets with brass handles; and several stoves and ovens.

Steel prep tables, like the one Robbie lay on in the downstairs freezer, had been spaced throughout.

My friends were in the far corner, in front of two enormous Sub-Zero refrigerators.

As soon as Mara saw me, the heated conversation ceased.

“What’s going on?”

They glanced at each other.

I crossed my arms and focused on Abigail. She was terrible at keeping secrets from me.

“Well?”

“Ewan thinks we should cancel everything. Mara and I don’t see the sense. No one will be able to leave for another day or two, and Angie and Damian have spent a small fortune on this wedding. If they don’t want to cancel, we shouldn’t interfere.”

I agreed with them.

“And what is your reasoning?” I asked Ewan.

“I don’t know,” he said. “Maybe because someone is trying to kill a friend of ours. Angie could have died. Mara could have as well. And we already have one murder to solve. I’m with you on that now. While we don’t

have the evidence, we do have someone trying to kill Angie. If the wedding is canceled, then whoever is trying to kill her might give up. Someone doesn't want her marrying Damien."

"So what? They should cancel everything they've planned for the last two years and give in to the threats?"

"Yes, if it keeps her alive."

I sighed. He had a point, but Angie would be devastated.

"We need to find the killer," I said. Ewan started to speak, and I held up a hand.

"Just don't. We are stuck here, and we might as well go through with the wedding. If we don't keep these people busy with preparations and the parties planned, the whole place will go mad. Think about it. If they cancel, then everyone is just sitting around wondering who the killer, or killers might be."

"Aye, you make a fair point."

"We'll have to be extra careful and keep an eye on the bride and groom. We'll make sure they're never alone, and we'll double-check their food and drink."

"Does anyone else think it's suspicious that only Angie seems to be the target? My first instinct is that it's someone in Damien's family," Abigail said.

She didn't talk as much as the rest of us, but when she did, the point was well made.

Ewan shook his head. "They are a well-respected family, and I can't see them resorting to murder."

"I heard the father threatened to blackmail his son," I said. "I wouldn't be so sure about that."

"From whom?"

"Caleb."

Ewan grunted. "He only looks out for himself. Probably just trying to lay blame so he can get away with one of his schemes."

"Why would he do that?" Mara asked.

"Believe it or not, he's a bit too much like his father, if you ask me." Ewan crossed his arms. "I wouldn't put it past him to commit murder if it suited his purpose."

I told them about what Caleb had said.

“The key to the kingdom is a big deal,” I said. “And Damien basically told him that he didn’t care. It might have pushed his father to murder—or at the very least, to hire someone to do it.”

Ewan crossed his arms. “Aye. We’ll take another look at the family.”

I shrugged. “Just leave Angie and Damien alone for now, okay? Don’t upset them with talk of canceling. She is stressed enough, and has had enough trauma in the last twenty-four hours for a lifetime. And she needs to rest.”

“What about someone else in their family?” Mara asked. “That side all looks like serial killers to me, with their beady eyes.”

“Mara,” I chastised.

“She’s not wrong,” Abigail said. “That one uncle of Damien’s who squints all the time gives me the creepers.”

We all laughed.

“I don’t know much about the rest of them. I’ve been trying to get information through our radios, but the storm has knocked out everything,” Ewan said. “I’ve no communication with our station anymore.”

Great. We were on our own.

“Except for Damien’s father and mother, everyone else seems to love the bridal couple,” Mara added. “At least, publicly.”

“Don’t forget Tiffany and Marianne,” I reminded them.

They nodded.

“Mara told me about them,” Abigail said. “They’ve already made enemies of the household staff with their demands.”

That didn’t surprise me.

“Did your men find anything suspicious in the bridesmaids’ rooms?”

Ewan shook his head.

“We need the internet so we can at least look up these people on social media to find out more about them,” I said.

“Not going to happen anytime soon,” Ewan said. “Although, if we can get through on the radio, I’ll have one of my men take a gander. Just give me a list of your suspects.”

Something niggled at my brain. “Have we talked to all the bridesmaids

and groomsmen? When we were questioning people, many of them were still passed out from the party.”

“What are you thinking?” Abigail asked.

“Motive and opportunity, right? The person who put the antifreeze in the water had to be at the hen party to make certain Angie drank from that bottle. A woman, right? Mara, I wish you could remember something from last night.”

“Everything is fuzzy.” She frowned. “I’m sorry I’m no help. I feel awful about it.”

“Why don’t you go through the events step by step,” Ewan offered. “Elizabeth made hot chocolate. I’ll get us some.”

“Do you need help?” Abigail asked.

“I’ve got it,” he said.

I didn’t want to tell him we’d just had some with Angie. And I didn’t see how the questions coming from him would make a bit of difference. But he was at least willing to discuss possibilities, which was a far cry from the last time we’d investigated a crime.

Five minutes later, we had cups of cocoa with homemade marshmallows. I had no idea marshmallows could taste so good. Ewan knew us all a bit too well, as he laid a plate of iced sugar cookies in the shapes of bats, jack-o’-lanterns, and ghosts on the table.

I grabbed a bat cookie.

“Mara, don’t try too hard to search for answers,” Ewan said. “Tell us what happened before the dinner last night. You were in the kitchen. Did you see anyone who might have been near where the drinks were stored?”

“Just the staff,” she said. “Your housekeeper, Elizabeth, had everything under control. People buzzed around like bees making honey. I checked on Jasper a few times and asked if he needed help.” She smiled. “He told me to get lost, though perhaps not as sweetly as that.”

We all chuckled. Jasper was obsessive about his work.

“Everyone was new to me in the kitchen, so I couldn’t tell you if there were strangers. But I don’t remember seeing anyone near the fridges where they stored the waters and drinks. And certainly no one like the picture you showed us of the victim.”

“Are you sure?” I showed her the picture of Robbie again. “Do you remember seeing him? Maybe somewhere else in or around the house?”

She pursed her lips. “I don’t think so, but there were a lot of people coming and going.”

“What about the dinner? Did you overhear any conversations?” Ewan asked.

“I heard pieces of a lot of different conversations. Remember, several family members were loud. It was your typical Scottish dinner.”

I had been surprised by how casually everyone viewed the arguments between family members.

“One of the groomsmen—is his name Byron? Or Ryan? They all have the same sort of names. It’s so confusing. Anyway, he kept trying to corner Damien at the cocktail party, but Angie kept pulling the groom away.”

“Interesting,” I said.

“Why is that?” Ewan picked up a cookie.

“On my way out to the garden, I saw Damien and Byron, if it’s the same guy, arguing in the hall. I was lost, so I can’t tell you where I was in the house, but they’d been talking about someone who owed money or something. Damien promised he’d take care of it.”

“I’ll follow up on that,” Ewan said.

“Oh. Mr. and Mrs. Carthage had one of those whispering arguments that people do during cocktails,” Mara added. “If evil eyes could kill, Mr. Carthage would be dead. She was angry at him. Probably for the way he’s been treating Angie.”

“Did you hear anything they said?”

“They were closer to Abigail on that side of the table. After working in the pub, though, you pick up on body language quick. There were some harsh words that passed between them.”

“Abigail?” Ewan asked.

“I was so worried about Tommy being in a new place, I didn’t pay attention to those around me. Angie’s Uncle Clyde was right next to me. He told stories about his farm. He’s hard of hearing and spoke loudly.”

“When you were at the hen party, was there any particular moment that stands out?” Ewan asked.

“Everyone was a bit topped off after dinner,” Mara said. “As you know, there were a lot of wines served. Wait!” She snapped her fingers. “The bridesmaids, Tiffany, and Marianne—the ones Em talked to—were having a fight.

“Before the hen, I went to our room to change into my party shoes. By the way, does anyone know what happened to my shoes last night?”

I smiled. “I put them in the closet for you. You were saying?”

“Thanks,” she said. “Tiffany and Marianne were arguing before the hen. Something about a special gift.”

Finally, some new information.

“Did they say anything else?”

“Not that I can remember. When they saw me, they stopped and went into a different room.”

“That’s suspicious,” Abigail said.

I nodded.

“They were also there for most of the party,” Mara said. “At least, as far as my memory goes. They got their nails done with Angie, so they both have the same polish.”

He glanced at his notebook again. “They said they left the party together.”

“They are each other’s alibi,” I added. “That screams suspect to me.”

“You aren’t wrong,” he said. “From the information you’ve gathered, they are the two people Robbie was in contact with the most.”

“I know you’ve thoroughly vetted your staff, Ewan, but money talks. My bet is still on Mr. Carthage. A man who blackmails his son might be capable of anything. We can’t rule out that he might have paid someone, maybe even one of the women in Damien’s family, to feed Angie that bottle. Or even one of your staff. They could have paid someone to get hired here.”

Everyone was silent as we stared at Ewan.

“Point well made.”

“Abigail, how about you?” I asked. “Did you see anyone suspicious?”

She shrugged. “Until Ewan came and got me last night. I stayed with Tommy except for the cocktails, dinner, and only an hour of the hen. I didn’t see anyone suspicious.”

“Oh, wait,” I said. “Jasper put Robbie near the garage, and he carried a container with blue liquid.” I read from my notebook.

“What?” Ewan’s voice deepened. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“Don’t be upset. I talked to him before the dinner tonight. I showed him Robbie’s picture, and he remembered seeing him near the garages or carriage house.”

“Okay, but we can’t be certain it was antifreeze he carried,” Ewan said. “We build the case on facts.”

We all stared at him.

“I’d say that his carrying the same thing that poisoned him is a pretty good fact.” I stuffed the rest of the bat cookie in my mouth to keep from saying what I really thought.

“Except we searched the property and didn’t find any antifreeze missing,” Ewan said. “My staff keeps track of every item that goes in and out of this house. Angus, who keeps care of the garage, measures everything, and he doesn’t make mistakes. All the antifreeze was accounted for.”

I huffed. “Really? He measures how much antifreeze is used in the garage?”

“Yes, every ounce.” Ewan set his cup down. “He runs this property and is responsible for the budget. Ask anyone. He’s a tough one on knowing exactly what comes in and goes out. He accounts for every penny.”

“But what if that part of the story is premeditated?” I asked.

“What do you mean?” Ewan frowned.

“I’m not sure. I have so many ideas rolling around in my head. The killer would have to know how much to use. It’s a very messy way to murder someone, and it might not have even worked. Like with Angie and Mara, who only had trace amounts.

“If he brought the antifreeze with him, then your staff wouldn’t know if it was missing.”

“Right,” Ewan said, “but we would have found the containers somewhere, and there is no evidence of that or the water bottle. And why would he poison himself if he brought it to the premises? There’s no logic there.”

He wasn’t wrong. I had the urge to beat my forehead on the table, I was

so frustrated.

I didn't.

"We need to know more about Robbie, and I feel like—and this is coming from the circumstances of the poisoning, and the attack on Angie—that we may have another man and a woman behind this. As in we may have two or three killers in play."

"My vote is Damien's dad," Mara said. "You might be right about him hiring someone to off poor Angie."

"I don't disagree, but Ewan is right. Murder? Would he risk his reputation like that?"

"Caleb might," Mara said. Then she made a funny face. "You've heard some of the stories Angie shared. He seems intent on destroying the family name. What better way than to kill the bride and her ex? Maybe make it look like a murder-suicide."

"Have you been rewatching *Vera* with the doctor again?" Ewan asked.

"Yes," Mara and Abigail said at the same time.

He shook his head but grinned.

"It's our thing," I said. "And those shows are helpful." Angie was another one who would hang out with us on Saturday nights when she was in town. We'd binge five or six episodes of our favorite mysteries, eat snacks, drink wine or cocktails, and talk about everything.

I've had great friends in my life, but never ones I connected with so quickly. I'd never had a squad, which is what Mara called our group of friends—that or the Scooby-Doo gang.

We were there for one another, no matter what was going on. As someone who had only moved to Scotland three months ago, I thanked the universe daily for these friends.

"Okay," Ewan said. "We keep an eye on Damien's family, the bridesmaids, and ... anyone else?"

"How about your staff?" I asked. "I mean, could there be an inside person? I'm sure everyone who works for you on a regular basis has been thoroughly vetted, but maybe you had to hire extras to handle so many guests?"

He frowned. "It's a possibility, but as you know, murder is personal."

“He could have hired an assassin,” Abigail said.

Once again, there was a long pause.

“Right, but antifreeze is an odd choice for poison, even for an assassin. I said it earlier. The person pulling the strings knew how easy it was to kill with antifreeze. That it tasted sweet and probably the victims wouldn’t notice.

“Maybe we need to focus on the first death. There were no external wounds or outward or inward signs of violence. The real question is, did he drink the poison on purpose, or did someone give it to him?”

“I’m thinking murder because I feel certain—and no, Ewan, I don’t have proof—he was here to disrupt the wedding. But something happened once they arrived. He could have changed his mind, or the killer decided to go in a different direction,” I reasoned.

“The obvious person to kill Robbie would be Damien,” Abigail said. “He’s a nice guy, but he loves Angie so much. I mean, we should all be so lucky to find someone who cares about us that much. But if the ex was here to make trouble ...”

“Or Angie’s family,” Mara added. “I wouldn’t put anything past those stepmothers and her mom. They are kind of wild. I could see any one of them killing someone to protect her.”

She had a point. That had been reiterated tonight by her mother and the second stepmother.

I flipped through my notebook. “Right, and the bridesmaids. Like I said earlier, Angie’s friend Tiffany dated the victim. She says Angie stole him from her. And Marianne is the cousin of the victim. I can’t imagine she’d want him dead, but that doesn’t mean she didn’t bring him to the premises.

“They had motives for revenge.”

“Go, Vera.” It was comical the way Abigail and Mara said it at the same time, with fist pumps.

“I talked to them tonight. Marianne mentioned her cousin had been through rehab in America. He had a good job. She thought he’d moved on. She did mention he was dating someone, but she didn’t know who.”

“Maybe it was Tiffany,” Mara said. “They might have been working together to get back at Angie. You’re right. That’s a lot of motive.”

Ewan grunted. “I’d hoped we’d narrow the list of suspects, not add

more.”

“So, we divide and conquer,” I said. “We’ve talked to several of the guests, but I say we go about this in a more organized way to follow up with some of these suspects.”

“That’s what we’ve been doing,” Ewan said under his breath.

“I believe she means in a non-constable sort of way. She found out so many details at the mixer just by talking to Tiffany and Marianne. Casually chat them up, but don’t give anything away, right?” Mara asked.

“Yes,” I said. “People put walls up with the police, but we’re just friends of the bride and groom who are curious about the families, and the people who are here.”

“It’s dangerous,” Ewan said. “If Em is right, we are dealing with killers. You might slip and say something wrong.”

Abigail snorted. “It isn’t like we haven’t done this sort of thing before.”

“Aye,” Ewan said. “But if you accidentally let the killers know we’re on to them, Angie may not be the only one who is in danger.”

“Is it sad that I find it exciting, except for the part where they hurt our friend, that we have a new murder to solve,” Mara said.

“This is no joke,” Ewan’s hands fisted. “You must be careful. I have a few of my men here and they will help, but until the storm lifts, we are on our own.”

I smiled.

“What?” he asked.

“You aren’t telling us to butt out. It’s nice.”

“Would it do any good if I asked you to let me handle it?”

My friends snorted.

“Exactly.” Ewan smirked.

“I need to get back to Tommy,” Abigail said.

“How is he doing?” I asked. I hadn’t seen him since we arrived.

“He’s in heaven. Ewan’s gardeners have taken him under their wings. Angels, they are,” she said. “They’ve been working in the covered garden. I’ll never get him away from this place.”

“He knows more about flowers than the four of them put together,” Ewan added. “Trust me, it goes both ways. I’ve already seen them repotting a

few of the new roses in the conservatory per Tommy's instructions."

I laughed. Mara's younger brother was the reason my garden was so beautiful. Even in the cooler weather, we had blooms. We never lacked for fresh flowers in my office or my house.

Ewan had most likely made sure Tommy was happy and occupied. The way he cared for the people in Sea Isle, was one of the things I admired most about him—even though he annoyed me often.

"I'm heading down to the dungeon to test this for fingerprints." I pulled the plastic bag with the mallet out of my bag.

"Give it to me," Abigail said. "After I check on Tommy, I'll use the kit. I'm too awake to be good for anything else."

"Are you sure?"

"Aye," she said.

I handed her the bag. "Thank you. I could use some rest."

After grabbing a couple of cookies to take with us, Mara and I headed back to our room. I kept my eyes open for anyone in the halls, but guests seemed to be tucked in for the night.

"Is it just me, or is this beautiful place creepy at night?" Mara asked.

"I feel the same way."

We shivered.

A loud creak sounded down the hall, and we stopped. The lights flickered. We looked at each other and then took off in a walk jog, our arms crooked together.

I opened the door to our room, and we rushed inside.

"*Ahh!*" Mara screamed.

Chapter Nine

I threw my hand over Mara's scream. "It's Angie," I said quickly. Our friend sat straight up in our bed and stared at us with glassy eyes. The beauty mask she'd been wearing slid down to her chest, giving the appearance of a melting face.

"Where have you been? I looked all over the castle for you," Angie said.

"Kitchen," Mara said. "You gave us a fright. I thought someone had mangled your face."

Angie pulled the face mask off and then hopped off the bed. "My skin is leather in this weather. I'm sorry if I scared you. Damien was getting on my nerves." She left us for the bathroom, and we followed her.

"You're supposed to be resting," I said. Something I was desperate to do.

"How can I when he just sits there and stares at me? He wants to cancel everything and for us to elope when the weather lifts. Can you imagine? Bloody idiot."

Mara and I glanced at each other.

"No. Do not tell me you agree with him." After tossing the mask in the bin, she put her hands on her hips. "I'm not canceling."

"Wouldn't dream of asking you to," I said. She appeared anxious, and there was no reason to tell her what Ewan wanted to do.

"Thank God, you are sensible. It's not my fault someone killed my ex. Did they? Do you know yet?"

We'd just told her. "We still can't be sure."

"Don't get me wrong—it's awful," she continued as if she hadn't heard me. "I said this before—I'm not some horrible person who doesn't feel anything for him. I feel sorry that he died that way. Em, you said it first,

though. He was probably up to no good.

“I didn’t do it, by the way. I know you are probably wondering, but I didn’t. I would tell you the truth if I had. Not that I could. You know that, right? If I’d seen him, I probably woulda ripped into him like a banshee, but wouldna killed him.”

It was obvious Angie needed to vent. I didn’t blame her.

“I don’t think Damien did it either. He’s not a very violent sort of guy. I know I said that before, but it’s true. He’s more likely to make the guy some cookies, listen to his complaints, and get him counseling. The only time I’ve seen him raise his hand was the night Robbie attacked him.

“I mean, he’s very protective, but I can’t see him killing someone. What have you two figured out? Tell me you know who murdered him.”

Mara and I glanced at each other.

Angie shook a finger. “You’ve been chatting, I can tell. Who?”

“You have a wedding in two days,” I said. “You leave this bit to us.”

“I can help,” she said. “I know all of these people better than most.”

“So, who do you think it is?” I asked.

“At first, my soon-to-be father-in-law, but why would he kill my ex if he was using him to break us up? Not that it would have worked.”

“You are here because you’re annoyed with your groom,” Mara said softly.

My eyes went wide. Angie was in no mood to be messed with, and I feared for Mara’s safety.

Her eyes narrowed at Mara. “That doesn’t mean I don’t want to marry him. I just had to get away from him for a bit. He’s in protective mode. I waited for him to fall asleep, and snuck out. I will not have some jerk murderers ruin my wedding.

“And I just realized that makes me sound like one of those bridezillas on that show from America. A man, one I loved once, has died. Who goes on with a wedding?” She sat down on the edge of the tub. “Robbie is dead.”

A tear slid down her cheek. “I’m a horrible person, right? We should send everyone home and cancel the lot.”

Given what she’d been through, this mania was expected.

“He fell asleep, and I just stared at him. I kept wondering if the man I

was about to marry might be a killer. Oh. My. I said that out loud. He's not. He's not." The last word was a sob.

I sat down on one side of her, and Mara on the other. We wrapped our arms around her.

"Take a deep breath," I said. "You're feeling manic. Quite honestly, who wouldn't? None of this is on you Angie. Now breathe again."

We all did it together.

"And another one." We did it again.

"I know we keep having this same conversation, but so much went into this wedding." Angie hung her head. "I go back and forth. Maybe Damien's right, and we should just elope."

"You're exhausted and have been quite ill, and you have a head injury," I said. "This is no time to make big decisions. Besides, what are all these people who are stuck here going to do? We can't leave, and the wedding at least gives everyone something else to focus on—other than that there is a murderer among us."

"But a man is dead," she said. "I can't get my head around it. I feel like I need to do something. Anything that will help find who did this."

"I want to ask you something, but I need you to stay calm," I said.

"Oh no."

"It's not bad. Why did you ask people like Tiffany and Marianne to be in your wedding?"

She sighed. "Why? What have they been saying now?" A tear slipped down her cheek. "Do you think one of them killed Robbie? I could see Tiffany doing something like that. She's been vindictive her whole life."

"So again, why is she here?" Mara asked.

"Half of the bridesmaids are friends of mine from when I was young. They had my back through my parents' many marriages. We all promised to be in one another's weddings when we grew up. Though I never thought I'd get married. At least, until I met Damien."

"It's old loyalties?"

She nodded. "We've stayed in touch through the years. Marianne was really upset with Robbie when she found out what he did. Tiffany—well, she's never had much self-esteem. I was the one always convincing her to try

new things.”

“Did you know she dated Robbie after you left him?” I asked.

She frowned. “Years later, she let it slip. It only made me worry about her more. Who goes after a man who has hurt another woman? She knew how bad the drugs were. Like I said, no self-esteem.”

“You are too kind,” Mara said. “Isn’t there an American saying like, ‘Ho’s before bro’s’?”

We chuckled.

Angie shrugged. “I haven’t always made the brightest decisions about boys. I’m guilty of doing things back then that I can’t believe I did. I wouldn’t judge any of them.”

“But do you think Tiffany could kill Robbie?”

She shrugged. “She has a dark side to her, but murder? Marianne wouldn’t have killed him. She told me earlier that he had his life back together, and she was so proud of him.”

“But could she have worked with him to hurt you?” It was a tough question, but I had to ask.

“Out of family loyalty? I don’t know. Marianne comes off rude, but she has a heart of mush. I can’t see her trying to kill me or helping him.” She put her face in her hands. “Why are we discussing murderers two days before my wedding? Have I been cursed?”

“No,” Mara and I said in unison.

“Maybe we should have eloped. Then I wouldn’t have people who are supposed to be friends trying to kill me.”

We hugged her.

“You have us,” I said. “We will get to the bottom of this and keep you safe. Don’t you worry.”

She wrapped her arms around us and squeezed hard. “What would I do without you two?”

“We feel the same way about you,” Mara said. “Don’t worry about anything except having the best wedding ever. The doc has a plan.”

I do?

“We’ll need to begin early in the morning. First, I need you to make me a list of anyone who might have had grievances against you. Even small, silly

ones. Anyone who is here in the castle is a suspect,” I said to Angie.

“I can do that,” she said. “I do have a favor.”

“Name it,” I said.

“I want to see Robbie. That sounds weird, so let me explain. It’s like it isn’t real. I saw the pictures, but I need to see him.”

“Oh, Angie, are you sure?” Mara asked. “That might send you over.”

She blew out a breath. “Yes. I need to do this.”

“If you need closure, we will make it happen,” I said. “Let’s get some rest. Do you want to stay in here with us?”

Angie sighed. “I should get back. Damien will worry if he wakes up, and I’m not there. Promise me we’ll figure this out.”

“Promise. We’ll take you back. Do me a favor and don’t run through these hallways alone, okay? At least, until we find out who is doing this.”

“Deal.”

After walking Angie back to her room and agreeing to meet up early the next morning, I climbed into bed. All the facts whorled around my brain, but one thing stuck out.

Someone had killed a man who had no business being here. Then they’d tried to kill Angie—twice. The killer was smart and wicked, a terrible combination when trying to catch a murderer.

★ ★ ★

The next morning, Angie, looking much more like herself, met us near the kitchen. She wore a silk scarf around her head, like a 1950s movie star, and another one of her jumpsuits. This one had sequined bouquets of flowers. Over it, she wore a pink, fake-fur coat.

The outfit absolutely worked for her.

“Is that one of Lulu’s designs?” Lulu, Angie’s aunt, had an unusual shop with all kinds of gifts, antiques, vintage clothing, and some of the designs she made—most of which were from the sixties and seventies.

She nodded and then winced.

“How do you feel?”

“Eh,” she said. “I’m hoping you have some pain pills in that huge bag you’re carrying.”

“I do. Are you sure you want to do this?”

“Um.”

“It’s okay if you changed your mind,” I said. “He was identified by several people, including his cousin, by the photograph.”

“Right, but to calm my thoughts and give me some peace, I need this.”

“Do you want to eat something first? You’ll need food before taking any medications.”

“No. Let’s get this done. I’m afraid to eat anything before. I might get sick.”

There was that.

“Okay.”

The castle was dark. The snow outside was so thick, it let no light in through the windows. The only lights were the ones gracing the hallways. Since no one was up except for the staff and us, the rest of the rooms were dark.

I shivered. I wasn’t sure I’d ever get used to this place.

Angie and Mara followed me down to the dungeon. Abigail was already there, working to lift fingerprints from the mallet used to hurt Angie. The bright lights in the makeshift autopsy suite made me blink.

“I’ve been in a few wine cellars, but I’ve never seen one like this,” Angie said.

“Me neither,” Mara whispered. “There is an entire wall of refrigeration for champagnes and white wines. This is a sommelier’s dream.”

“Oh.” Angie put her hand on my shoulder when we turned down the aisle toward the setup where Abigail was working. “Is that him in the bag? I’ve seen this sort of thing on television.”

“Yes. Again, it isn’t necessary that you do this, Angie.”

“I know,” she said. “I just need a few seconds to prepare myself. I have it in my head that it’s some actor the murderer hired and that it’s not really Robbie.”

Abigail worked at one of the side tables she’d set up.

“Take your time. Let me know when you’re ready.”

“Any luck?”

“I lifted a couple of prints,” Abigail said. “Without access to the internet,

there's no way to run it through any sort of database. Henry said as soon as the storm lifted, we'd be able to check.

"But the finger pad size is smaller. It could have been a woman or a small man."

I stepped back, and my foot hit a metal tray. I glanced down to find the floor littered with paper and medical equipment.

"What happened?" I leaned down to pick up some of the debris.

"Stop," Abigail said. "Henry came down with me this morning, and he's gone to get more evidence bags. Looks like someone had a rummage around last night when we weren't here."

"Interesting. I thought the door was supposed to be locked."

"It is," Henry said as he came into the lighted space. "But it was open when we came down. I've alerted the constable. He's working with the others to find some sheep whose pen was knocked down last night."

"In this weather? He and the men could be killed or freeze to death."

"He knows what he's doing, Doctor." Henry said.

I hoped so. Ewan might have been annoying, but I certainly didn't want him dead.

"I'm ready," Angie said. "If it's okay. I didn't want to bother your doctoring stuff."

"What's this?" Henry asked. "We don't want anyone contaminating the crime scene."

Angie's hands shook, and she crossed her arms. "If it's not a good time ..."

"Henry, don't be rude," Abigail said sternly. I'd never seen her talk that way to him. "Angie needs to make sure he's not some actor made to look like the victim. We need her to do this."

No one said a word to Abigail about her discussion the night before, but she was instinctive.

Henry's face fell, and his eyes went wide. "I'm sorry—of course. Let me just clean a path for you." He wore gloves and stuffed the items that had been strewn about into evidence bags.

Poor guy was only trying to do his job. Abigail had no idea of the power she had over him.

A few minutes later, a path had been cleared. Abigail put her hand on the zipper of the body bag. “Are you ready?”

Mara and I stood on each side of Angie, with our arms crooked in hers for support. She’d been right the night before. She wasn’t the sort of woman who fainted, but she’d been through a lot in the last forty-eight hours. I wasn’t taking chances.

Abigail unzipped the bag to the man’s shoulders. I’d sewn him back up, but there was no reason for poor Angie to see my handiwork.

Angie frowned. “It doesn’t look like him.”

Mara and I glanced at each other.

“What’s wrong, Angie.”

“This man is too old. He’s so rough looking. How could anyone think it was Robbie. How did I think that from the photo? It can’t be him. What about his tattoos? Can you take the zipper down a bit more so I can see the right side of his ribcage and if he has arm art.”

I held up a hand. “The body is—I had to do a full autopsy.”

“I can take it. I need to know for sure if someone is playing a trick on us. I’m telling you, I don’t think this is Robbie. Yes, there are similarities, but no one ages like that in five years. And his nose was banged up when we dated. It’s straight now.”

I almost wanted to mention that it probably didn’t feel like a trick to the dead man, but it wasn’t appropriate.

I nodded toward Abigail. I’d examined the body thoroughly, and I knew exactly what she’d see.

She pulled the zipper down, showing a demonic tattoo painted red and black on the right side of his ribcage. His arms were covered in tattoos.

“I—it is him.” She pulled out of our arms and then quickly walked away. I followed her down the long corridor to the steps going back upstairs. She stopped and sat down.

“I’m dizzy.”

“Bend over and put your forehead on your knees.” She did as I asked. “Take deep breaths.”

“I—it’s—oh no. This is real.” Her body shook hard.

“You’re in shock,” I said. “Take deep breaths.”

“It’s real. It’s real.”

“I’m sorry,” I said.

“He looks so old. He’s the same age as Damien. I mean, we—why does he look so old?”

“Heroin addiction is not kind on the body,” I said. “It ages you quickly.”

“There’s a dead man in the dungeon and it *is* my ex.” She repeated the phrase three times.

“Why don’t we get you some tea or coffee upstairs,” I said.

“I can’t get up yet. Trust me, if I could run I would. But my head feels like a hive of bees buzzing loudly.”

“Just sit here a few minutes—I’ll be right back. Do not try to go upstairs without me, okay? We can’t risk you falling before the wedding.”

“There isn’t going to be a wedding. Did you see him? He’s real. A dead man is in the dungeon.” She kept saying it over and over.

I was afraid to leave her.

“Mara,” I shouted.

Angie winced.

Mara came running around the corner. She glanced from me to Angie. Then she frowned. “Tell me what to do.”

This was one of the many reasons I adored her.

“We need to get her upstairs. She’s in shock. You walk in front of her, and I’ll walk behind. If I thought her fiancé could get her up those twisted stairs, I’d have you go get him. It just isn’t safe.”

“I can walk,” Angie said in a strangled voice. “Stop talking about me like I’m not sitting right here. I—” She tried to stand but sat down hard on the stone step.

“Oh.” And then her hands were on her face, and she sobbed. It was honestly the best thing for her. The release of tension was good for someone in shock.

“Tea, full of sugar,” I said to Mara.

She raced up the steps. Well, as fast as one could go. While not as treacherous as the stairs in the tower, they weren’t easy to navigate.

I sat down next to Angie and wrapped my arms around her.

“None of this is your fault. I’m sorry,” I whispered.

“Why? You didn’t kill him. Did you?”

I grabbed a tissue from the pocket of my cardigan and handed it to her.

“No, but I can hurt for my friend who should be experiencing the happiest time of her life.”

“It’s not happy.”

“I know, friend. There’s a dead guy in the dungeon.”

“For the last time, it’s a wine cellar,” Ewan grumped. He held a cup of tea above us. After sitting on the step just behind us, he handed the fine porcelain cup to Angie. “Drink this. Now,” he ordered.

“He’s dead, Ewan.”

“I know, luv. It’s not your fault.”

“That’s what Em says, but we are here because of me.”

“True. You were the one who wanted a gothic wedding,” he said.

Angie gasped.

I gave him my best evil eye.

“Dead guy just adds to the atmosphere, right? Whoooooo.” He made ghost hands and crossed his eyes. “Imagine, a ghost walking you down the aisle instead of your old da. That would send those society pages crazy.”

Appalled, I glared at him.

Angie giggled. “You are awful.” She laughed louder. “Like, really terrible.”

“Yes, lass. As the doc would say, it’s one of my superpowers.”

I’d never said any such thing, but Angie was laughing even harder now. I took her tea, so she didn’t drop the porcelain cup.

He’d known exactly what to say to snap her out of it.

“Come on, punk. Let’s get you upstairs. Doc may have to sedate your fiancé. He was frantic when he couldn’t find you this morning.

“My legs wobble,” she said.

“Put your hands on my shoulders and lean in hard. I’ve got you.”

And he did. Mara and Damien stood by the door when we emerged from the dungeon.

“Babe, why did you go down there?” Damien squeezed her tightly to him. And kissed her face. “I’ve been worried about you. At least leave me a note. Better yet, don’t go anywhere alone.”

“I had to know for sure. And I didn’t walk to the kitchen alone. Mum went with me. She wanted to check on some flowers or something.”

I hadn’t seen her mother when Angie arrived.

He stopped, and then stared at her. “And?”

“What?” she asked.

“Did you figure out for sure who it is?”

Her lips trembled, and then she steeled herself. “It’s him. Why would he be here, Damien? Why does he look so different?”

“We’ll find out, Angie,” I said. “I mean it.”

“He had his nose fixed. That’s weird, right? He wasn’t the type.”

A loud crash and screams came from the kitchen.

“What now?” I asked.

Only a blood-curdling scream answered.

Chapter Ten

The screams rang sharp in my ears as we neared the kitchen. Thankfully, we didn't have far to run. Some of the staff were on the floor, and others were scrambling up on counters to get out of the way.

Flour and other ingredients had been thrown about like a tornado had torn through the normally pristine kitchen.

Then there was Jasper, running around like a mad man with a butcher knife.

"I'll kill them. Bloody menaces." He snarled. His apron was covered in icing and cake.

"Jasper." Ewan's powerful voice reverberated against the marble kitchen walls.

Everyone stopped.

Jasper glanced up, and the knife clattered to the floor.

"What is going on?" I asked.

"Bloody sheep," Jasper growled.

Three small lambs ran around the kitchen. Ewan scooped two of them up, and Tommy, Abigail's brother, caught the third. Then Tommy sat on the floor and put his face into the neck of the baby lamb. The young man's arms shook with fear.

"Mara, get Abigail from the dungeon," I whispered.

I knelt next to Tommy. Routine was his friend, and anything outside of that caused him a great deal of anxiety. I frowned at Jasper. A crazy man running around with a butcher knife would have scared anyone.

Even though we all knew Jasper was harmless.

This situation was too intense for him. He needed a calm atmosphere,

surrounded by familiarity.

“You’re okay,” I whispered. “Whatever happened, no one is mad. No one will hurt you.”

Without looking up, he pointed at Jasper. “Kill the babes. I have to protect them. Jasper is bad.”

Jasper’s face was red with embarrassment. “I’m sorry, Tommy. You’re right. I’m an arse.”

“Arse is a bad word. Abbie says we can’t say it.”

“You’re right, lad. The lambs knocked over the cake I’ve been working on for two full days, and I—I did not act appropriately. I apologize if I frightened you.”

“Babes are more important than cake.”

Jasper appeared as if he didn’t agree, but then he sighed. “You’re right. I wouldn’t have hurt them. I was just angry. I’m not now. You’re safe. The lambs are safe. Everyone is safe.”

“They lost their mum.” Tommy’s sweet voice was so sad, it tore at my heart. “I don’t have a mum. Have to take care of the babies like Abby takes care of me.”

That was the most I’d ever heard him say at once, but it was like a mantra, and he kept repeating it.

“I’m a horrible person.” Jasper sat down on the floor and put his head in his hands. “I wasn’t thinking.”

He and Tommy were equally distressed.

“Tommy, the lambs are safe, thanks to you. That was very courageous of you to protect them,” I said softly. “You are a big hero to them.”

“Big knife.” Tommy kept his face snuggled in the lamb’s neck.

“I put it down, I promise. I was just frustrated,” Jasper said. To his credit, he appeared forlorn that he’d upset Tommy. We were all close, this little group of mine. We looked out for Abigail’s brother and included him in our get-togethers—even if that meant he was in a corner chair, with headphones, playing games or watching television on a tablet.

“Like when you play your games too loud, and I’ve asked you more than once to turn them down,” Abigail said behind me. Sometimes she was ninja quiet.

I glanced back to find her standing with Henry.

“Why are the lambs in the kitchen?” she asked in her direct way.

“Mum’s dead. Too much snow. Building a pen in the garden—too cold outside. Someone left the door open. Not me,” Tommy said.

Again, he spoke much more than I’d ever heard him.

“That’s right,” Ewan said. “That’s what we were doing when I came inside. It was probably me who left the door open. Mara said Angie was sick again, and I took off running. I’m sorry too, Tommy—and Jasper.”

“I lost the plot,” Jasper said.

“Crazy. Crazy.” Tommy finally looked up, though he didn’t make eye contact with anyone.

“We do not say that word.” Abigail pointed a finger at him.

“He said ‘arse,’” Tommy responded.

“I did,” Jasper admitted.

“Jasper did look like Sweeny Todd,” I added. Everyone in the kitchen put a hand over their mouth, to hide a smile, except for Ewan. His arms were full of sheep. Still, he smiled.

“Attend the tale of Sweeny Todd. His skin was pale, and his eye was odd.” Tommy sang the lyrics in a clear baritone voice.

“You have a beautiful voice,” I said.

“He does,” Mara agreed.

“Music soothes him,” Abigail said. “We didn’t have many CDs when we were young, so we listened to Mum’s musicals. With most things he likes, he remembers every word.”

“I loved that musical,” Jasper said. Then he stared up at Abigail. “I feel awful. I’m so sorry. The lambs ran through and tripped me. I fell into the cake and lost my mind.”

“My cake is ruined!” Angie sniffed and then took off down the hall.

“I’ve got this,” Damien ran after her.

“Tommy, I can’t apologize enough,” Jasper said. “You and the lambs didn’t do anything wrong. I made a mistake. It isn’t an excuse. No one should run after anything with a knife.”

“A big knife,” Tommy clarified.

“Right. I better tell Angie it was just the top two tiers. Easy-peasy to fix.

Tommy you were right. I was wrong. I'm sorry." Jasper followed the couple out.

"I made her cry." Tommy's eyebrows drew together.

It took a minute for me to understand who he meant.

I reached out but didn't touch his arm. He wasn't big on physical contact, and he held the baby in his arms like a lifesaver.

"No. You didn't," Abigail said. "Ewan left the door open. You were only trying to help."

"But she cried." While he didn't always exhibit emotions, he understood them.

"She was hurt on the head last night and didn't sleep much," I said gently. "And someone she knew died. I promise you her tears had nothing to do with you, Tommy."

"Did the bad man hurt her? Abbie said the bad man was dead."

I glanced over at his sister, who had moved to the other side of him, where Jasper had been.

"Why do you think he was bad?" Ewan asked.

"He is bad. He yelled at me. 'Get out of the way. Get out of the way, stupid.' Same man on your phone. He can't yell anymore."

Abigail's eyes widened. She pulled her phone from her pocket. "Did you look at the pictures on my phone again?"

He nodded. "Mr. Manor said the *Rosa pimpinellifolia* wouldn't grow in the garden. I wanted to show him the picture of the one at Doctor Emilia's. Good soil, I say. Good soil. Must be fresh. No replanting in the same soil. Roses like fresh."

Sometimes following Tommy's train of thought wasn't easy, but I had the gist of it.

"So, you saw the bad man and he yelled at you. Then you saw his picture on your sister's phone?"

Tommy rocked with the lamb. "Bad man. Bad man." He didn't always appreciate direct questions. His mind processed words differently. I knew that, but my curiosity had the better of me.

"How about we take these lambs back to the pen," Ewan offered. "We can finish it off. Then we can help Jasper clean up."

“No knives.” Tommy said. Then he handed me the lamb to hold. The tiny animal was even softer than it looked. I’d never held a farm animal before. There was a first time for everything.

Tommy stood and then reached down for the sweet creature. But as he picked it up, the animal pooped on my black jeans.

Everyone laughed, including me.

“He yelled at the lady. Yell. Yell,” Tommy said. “You don’t yell. Even the poop. No yelling.”

Everyone paused.

“What lady?” Abigail asked softly.

“No face. Ran away. Too much yelling.”

Tommy had put more together than the rest of us had in two days. It was what we suspected: there was an accomplice.

It had been quite the eventful morning.

What if this mess in the kitchen had been on purpose?

“Abigail, did Henry lock the door to the dungeon?” I asked.

“Wine cellar,” Ewan called out. He was halfway to the back door with the two lambs in his arms. Then he stopped.

“No,” Henry said. “We came running when Mara said Tommy was upset.”

Abigail took off running. Before I could get off the floor and clean myself off, she was back upstairs.

“It’s gone. The mallet used to hit Angie.”

A diversion. That’s what had just happened, and it hadn’t been Ewan or Tommy’s fault.

“I’ll add a new lock to the cellar.” Ewan shook his head.

Tommy followed him out the back door.

Whoever was behind this was scary clever.

★ ★ ★

Later that afternoon we were to appear in the grand salon, I had no idea which room that was until Mara showed me. A ceilidh dance class had been planned.

In the itinerary, Angie had stated: *You will not look like a bunch of drunk*

Scots on my wedding videos. Attendance is mandatory.

When Mara and I walked in, it was crowded, which was probably a good thing, since Angie didn't need any more stress. In fact, Mara and I wondered if she'd even show up. The last time I'd checked on her, she'd been sound asleep.

I needn't have worried. She came in right behind us, with Damien. But she wore no makeup. Her hair was in a short ponytail at the nape of her neck, and she wore jeans and a plain cable-knit sweater.

Her appearance was very un-Angie-like.

"Are you okay," I whispered.

She turned her back to the crowd and faced me.

"I feel like I've been poisoned, bonked on the head, and had my wedding ruined. But Ewan said to keep everyone busy. They want to search the rooms again. Damien and I are doing our part, pretending to carry on for now."

The more everyone was together, the better. It would be noticeable if someone was absent from the group events.

There was also the fact Ewan had taken me seriously.

"I think everyone would understand if you needed to rest."

She shook her head. "I think it might be better if Damien and I keep ourselves busy as well. We've never fought as much as we have the last twenty-four hours. I'm wondering if our relationship can handle stress at all."

I took her hand in mine. "You are in extraordinary circumstances. Give him, and yourself, some grace. And think about it. Pretending to be happy and having fun will really make your soon-to-be-father-in-law angry."

She smiled. "There is that."

"I know we keep saying this, but don't make any decisions about your wedding right now. Don't say anything to anyone who asks. Leave the prying to Mara and myself. We'll get this figured out for you."

"After seeing Robbie, I've decided to help," she said.

"Uh." That wasn't a great idea. Her life was already in danger.

"No. Don't say it. I told you that I know most of these people better than anyone else."

"Right, but don't get too pushy, okay? Like Ewan said, we don't want to clue in our killers that we—as in you, me, Mara, and Abigail—are trying to

figure out a mystery. Understood?”

“Yes, *Vera*.”

I laughed at her reference to our favorite television show.

“Now what is *ceilidh* dancing?”

“It’s a Scottish wedding dance. Sort of like something you Yanks do when someone calls out moves, and you’re all moving at once.”

“Square dancing?”

“Odd name, but yes, I think that’s it.”

“Okay. Do me a favor and look around to see if anyone is missing other than Mr. Carthage.”

“I will.” She moved to the front of the room, where a man I didn’t recognize stood with a fiddle. A tall, lanky man in a kilt stood beside him.

Where had these guys been staying? I hadn’t seen them at any of the events.

This enormous castle was too large for us to keep track of all the occupants.

“Wee bit of instructing,” the tall man said. I assumed he’d be the one calling the dance. I’d never taken part in anything like this. I’d never been one for dancing except for the occasional whirl around the floor with my husband at fundraising events.

That life felt like it had happened centuries ago to someone else. It was surreal that I’d left America only three months ago.

Everyone shifted to one side of the room or the other. Of course, I’d been lost in thought and hadn’t heard any of the *wee instructions*. The women were on one side, the men on the other.

That was simple enough.

The fiddler played, and the man called out something, but I had no idea what language it might have been. Everyone moved forward, and Ewan was in front of me, sticking out his right hand.

Where did he come from?

He pulled me to him and then gently shoved me back, and somehow, I ended up on the other side of the room.

Then we did it again.

The moves changed. I was always a beat behind. The callouts were a mix

of Gaelic and highly accented Scottish. I had to watch everyone else first, before I moved, because I didn't understand.

Poor Ewan probably rued the day he'd decided to stand across from me, but he was patient.

"Shouldn't you be searching rooms for the weapon?" I asked when he pulled me near again.

"My men have it covered." He swirled me away again.

When we met up again, everyone stopped for the man calling out the moves to explain the next part.

"They are smart," I said.

"They?" he asked.

"We know there is a woman," I whispered. "Tommy saw her. Did you by chance get a description from him?"

"No. He needed to calm down first. He doesn't do well when he feels cornered."

"Right. But we need to know at least what color hair she had."

"I'll ask him later. He's busy with the lambs. Might be best to get Abigail to handle it, though."

"You're right. Is Tommy okay?"

He shrugged. "I left him in the pen with the lambs. My gardeners will look after him. He's happiest with flowers and animals."

"True. That voice of his?"

"Was a beauty," he said. "Never 'eard him sing."

Everyone moved apart, and that ended our conversation.

I was too busy trying to keep up to ask anything else.

Mara was a few people down from me, laughing with a very handsome man. I'd seen him at some of the functions. She was full-on flirting. I'd never seen her bat her eyelashes at any man.

Interesting.

I wouldn't have exactly called the dancing fun, but I've had worse times. There was a lot of laughter all around. I wasn't the only klutz in the group, but everyone took it good-naturedly.

I'd hoped to get to know more about our cast of characters in the castle, but everything moved much too fast.

Toward what I hoped was the end, Damien and Angie danced an intricate jig down the center and appeared happier than I'd seen them in days. Angie's cheeks were flushed, and her smile was genuine. Then another couple came down the center, and I understood that it would soon be our turn.

My heart thumped faster.

We had nothing rehearsed, and the others had obviously talked about it. Most of the couples looked like they'd been dancing together for years—even though many of them had just met a few days before.

Each of the stepmothers tried to outdo the last. They were funny, and each of them would blow Angie and Damien a kiss as they danced by.

They were sweet for a group of possible suspects.

I'd barely had a chance to know my mom. She'd abandoned me to my grandmother, and later to foster parents. It wasn't until she was dying that my mom came back into my life.

I forgave her. I'd never understand the choices she made, but I'd had a better life without her. Of that, we'd both been certain.

"Follow my lead," Ewan whispered.

I'd been wool-gathering and hadn't realized we were at the top of the line. Before I could say anything, he twirled me three times and then pulled me along in something akin to the polka. I'd never been so grateful for anything to end.

"Excellent," said the man who had been calling the steps.

At least I understood that word. My performance was far from that, but he'd said it to everyone coming down the line.

The dancing was more something I survived, but it appeared to have put the others in a good mood.

The caller and fiddler took a bow. Everyone clapped. The excitement in the room was palpable. The exercise had been good for everyone. There were probably a few who had a bit of cabin fever. Though how that could happen in this castle, I had no idea.

Most days I was exhausted just going from my room to wherever the next function might be.

Refreshments had been brought in by the staff. Henry stood guard over the table with soft drinks, water, sandwiches, fruit, and veg.

This time, no one in the crowd hesitated to grab some food. Maybe it was the presence of law enforcement that made them feel safe. Or the fact that we'd expended many calories dancing for the last hour and half.

People didn't seem in any hurry to leave. After grabbing some snacks, I walked slowly through the room, catching bits of conversation here and there, but nothing that appeared suspicious.

That was, until I came up on Caleb and Tiffany angrily whispering.

"I'm not the one trying to ruin the wedding," Caleb said. "It must be you. You've always been jealous of his relationship with Angie."

"Shut up, Caleb. You're such a jerk. Like you weren't jealous when he swooped in and saved the day? I saw you watching her at the club at Damien's birthday. I almost offered you a towel for the drool. You're still not over her."

Wait. Caleb used to like Angie?

Did she know? I'd stepped into the middle of a soap opera with the two villains.

"You can't get over what you never had," he said.

She rolled her eyes. "Bullocks. It wasn't me who brought Robbie here. I'll swear to that one."

"Then who did?" he asked. He seemed genuinely curious.

"Probably you. Robbie was your go-to for drugs for years. I bet your family doesn't know that. You probably owed him money and were forced to bring him here. Maybe I should tell the constable about your past dealings."

"Do it, and I'll have a few things to tell Angie about you. Like that time you tried to screw her soon-to-be husband." He snarled, and his voice became hateful.

Tiffany had tried to sleep with Damien.

"Maybe I should have left you in his room. As we know, my brother is far from perfect."

"I was drunk."

"Did I make a good substitute that night for my brother?"

"You are a jerk. A good man would have sent me on my way and wouldn't have taken advantage of the situation."

My stomach turned.

Angie had been right about Tiffany's self-esteem, but Caleb was not a good man.

"We were both drunk and neither of us thinking clearly," Caleb continued. "You can't blame me for that. I'll ask again, Tiffany: Who brought Robbie here?"

"I've no idea. Now scurry off like the rat you are."

I didn't have time to move away quick enough, and he ran right into me.

"Doc, you keep popping up in the most unexpected places."

"Sorry. I'd been looking up at the ceiling and wasn't watching where I was going. It's gorgeous. Every room in this place is."

He glanced up and then frowned at the fresco painted there.

"Hmm. Hadn't noticed that one. Are you sure you weren't eavesdropping on my conversation with the bridesmaid?"

I scrunched up my face. "What? No. It's so loud in here, everyone's voices are echoing." That wasn't a lie. "I didn't even see you there. It's so crowded, I was about to head back to my room."

"Would you like an escort?"

I faked a smile. "No thanks."

I shoved past him. Once I made it through the intricately carved double doors, I peered over my shoulder. He hadn't followed me.

Thank small graces for that.

Needing some fresh air, I found the center hall to the courtyard garden. While it was much lighter than it had been a few nights ago, the snow still came down furiously.

I petted the lambs in the pen Tommy and Ewan had set up. It was near one of the heat lamps, which made this a toasty winter wonderland for them. I sat on a bench nearby and ate my sandwich.

I'm not one for large groups of people, and it was a regular event here at the castle. Just a few more days, and it would be over.

But the question of the day was, Would the happy couple get married before someone killed one of them?

I had to keep that from happening.

My heart hurt for Angie, more than she'd ever know. It wasn't fair that her wedding was the stuff of nightmares.

More than anything, I wished things had gone smoothly for her.

Few people understood better than me that life never quite went to plan. I, and my patients in the ER, were living proof of that. I never thought I'd end up living in Scotland. My patients in the ER had often suffered some of the worst days and nights of their lives.

Everything could change in an instant, and it did it far more than any human might be prepared for most days.

I finished up my food and put the trash in a small bin near the lamb enclosure. I petted the lambs again. I was certain there were more sheep than humans in Scotland. There were fuzzy and furry ones, and all types of colors. Wool was a big deal here. Probably because of the freezing temps outside.

I'd need to shop for warmer layers when I went home.

I peered up to the white haze above me. It was like being in a snow globe.

Then there was a large clatter, like someone had knocked something over.

"Hello? Is anyone here?" I shivered, and it had nothing to do with the cooler temps in the garden.

"If you broke something, I won't tell."

An eerie silence prevailed. Dread slithered down my spine. I hurried down the center path toward the glass doors going into the house.

There was a weird scraping sound. My stomach knotted.

I stopped just below the terrace above, which was also enclosed inside the dome. The scraping noise happened again.

The unnerving silence sent another chill down my spine.

"I don't know who's up there, but this isn't funny." I'd just stepped under the terrace when I tripped on my own feet. I fell forward, but something brushed the back of my calf.

I hit the stone floor with my knees, about the same time something crashed behind me.

As I pushed myself up, I glanced back to find one of the gargoyles from the terrace staring back at me.

I must be getting close to the killer.

Someone is trying to kill me.

Chapter Eleven

I must have screamed, because half the kitchen staff came running. Henry was with them. “Are you all right, Doctor?”

“I-I don’t know. Can you help me up?”

After reaching down to lend me a hand, he half dragged and half carried me to a settee inside the rotunda that served as the entrance to the garden.

Ewan came skidding around the corner, on the wood floors, with Mara as I sat down.

“What happened?” he bellowed.

“Are you hurt?” Mara said equally loudly. “Why are you running around by yourself? I thought we decided to stick to pairs.”

I didn’t remember that part of the plan, but I’d been awfully tired the last few days.

“One of the gargoyles fell, sir,” Henry said. “Nearly missed the doctor. The rumblings from last night probably loosened it. She’s lucky she wasn’t a hair slower.”

“It didn’t miss, and it was pushed.” I rolled up my pants, and then turned sideways to check the damage. My right calf had already turned a light shade of blue and ached terribly. A piece of the gargoyle had torn through the leg of my jeans, and blood oozed out of an abrasion.

“Bloody hell. What have you done now?” He was down on his knees, pushing on the contusions.

“Ewan. Ouch.”

“Is anything broken?”

“I don’t think so. It’s swelling quickly and hurts. There could be a hairline fracture, but I won’t know until it’s X-rayed.”

I was more than happy it was my leg and not my head. That was something I wouldn't have survived.

"Those things weigh a ton," Ewan said.

"I heard a scraping sound just before it fell," I said. "Someone was on the terrace while I was out there."

Ewan brushed his hand through his hair. "Hell, now they're after you."

I smiled. I wasn't sure if it was because he believed me or that he'd sworn so much. He was a man who usually kept his emotions quite close to his chest.

"Henry, run upstairs and check. Maybe we'll get lucky, and you'll find the demon. At the very least, investigate the crime scene."

The younger officer took off.

Ewan leaned over to get a better look at my leg.

"We need ice," he said. "It's swellin' as we speak."

I twisted around so that my knee was on the fabric. Then I pushed in on the flesh and bit the inside of my lip hard to keep from groaning. It hurt, but I didn't feel anything broken.

"I'll get the ice," Mara said.

"At least you'll be able to find a better dance partner," I said.

"I quite liked the one I had."

It took me a moment to understand he'd just complimented me in an odd way.

"Are you sure it isn't broken?"

"I don't think so."

"We need to check the rest." Without asking, he unzipped my low-heeled booty and then slipped off my owl socks. I'd worn them to lift my mood. I had a drawer full of silly socks. One of those habits left over from childhood. My grandmother would find the silliest socks she could find, to make me laugh.

I still had a few pairs she'd given me, and she'd died decades ago.

"I tripped. At least, I think that's what happened. While I heard noises on the terrace, and weird scraping sounds, I didn't realize the gargoyle was falling until it crashed behind me."

"Tripping may have saved your life."

I nodded. “Why me? You’re the constable. Wouldn’t they be more worried about you catching on?”

“I’m not asking all the pushy questions to strangers.”

I grunted. “I’m never pushy. It’s my natural curiosity.”

He smiled. “Who did you talk to today? Did you make anyone angry?”

I shook my head, which throbbed harder than my leg.

“I’ve mainly only spoken to our little group. After the dance, I ran into Caleb. He’d been grilling Tiffany, and I may have overheard that part of the conversation.”

“Tell me.”

I bit my lip. “Some of it is embarrassing,” I said.

He sighed. “Just tell me, lass.”

I gave him the basics.

“When he turned to leave, I happened to be standing there. I made an excuse about the ceilings.”

“The ceilings?”

“Yes. How you have frescos on them in almost every room. It’s quite remarkable what you’ve done with this place.”

“Thanks. Let’s stay focused, Doctor. Tiffany says she didn’t do it, and Damien admitted the same.”

“Yes. And then he turned around and ran into me.”

“That’s what I’m saying. You have the habit of being in the wrong place at the wrong time.”

“Or the right one,” I said. “How else would I have discovered he thought Tiffany was the one who brought Robbie?”

“Are we certain she didn’t? She could have lied to him.”

“True. We may need to knock Caleb off the list. He was genuinely curious as to who brought Robbie.”

“Tiffany could have been lying, and he could have been trying to divert attention from himself since he’s not the best guy in the world,” Ewan said.

“Tiffany said Caleb used to like Angie too. Did you know that? And that Damien swooped in before he could make his move.”

“Not likely,” Ewan grumbled. “Caleb would have never had a chance. I’ve never seen a couple more perfectly matched.”

I'd witnessed that as well.

"This is beginning to sound like *Coronation Street*." He sat back on his heels.

Since I'm a fan of British programming, I did know that was a soap opera. But I'd never seen it. My interest tended toward the mystery and detective shows.

"I've got the ice," Mara said as she came around the corner. "Abigail is taking tea and snacks to our room. She said we should elevate the leg, and she sent one of Ewan's men to bring up your kit."

I laughed.

"What's so funny?"

"Even when she hasn't seen the injury, Abigail can anticipate my needs. She's brilliant that way."

"That she is," Ewan said. "Okay, Doc, let's get you settled in."

He started to scoop me up, and I pushed him away.

"It's not broken, I can walk."

But as I tried to stand on my left leg, my knee gave out, and I hit the cushion hard.

I rolled up my pants leg. My other kneecap was dislocated.

Great. Just great.

Ewan shook his head. Then he leaned down and scooped me up like I weighed nothing.

I am not thin, but to him it seemed like nothing.

Mortified, I let him carry me to my room.

He set me down gently on the edge of the bed. Then he set about taking off my other shoe and sock. I was only naked from the knees down, but it felt odd for him to see me like this.

"Abigail can help me reset this," I said as I stared down at my knee. Unlike my right calf, which was a light blue, my knee had turned blackish purple. That was going to hurt if we didn't get it fixed before it swelled much more. "I'll be fine, Ewan. Go check on your guests."

"I'm going to get more ice." Mara set a bag of ice wrapped in a kitchen towel next to me.

"I can do this," Ewan said. "I've popped many a joint back into position

while doing Highland games and rugby.

The pain in my other leg was so bad, the dislocation wasn't that big of a deal.

Still, it needed to be done sooner rather than later.

"Let me get in the right position first."

I leaned back on the intricate headboard.

"When I say go, I need you to grab my ankle and lift the leg. Pull gently. As you do that, I will try to pop the kneecap back into place. It's important to keep it taut."

He nodded.

Once I was ready, I took a deep breath and used the heel of my right hand to click it back into place. The sickening sound was one I'd been used to, but it was different when resetting oneself.

As I let the breath out, a wave of nausea hit, but I didn't get sick.

Ewan gently put my leg back on the pillow.

I put the ice Mara had brought for the other leg on my knee.

"You didn't scream." Ewan said it like a compliment. "I've seen tough men cry over less."

"Compared to the other leg, it's not that bad. That, and I have a high tolerance for pain."

"Tell me how I can help."

There was no use arguing with him.

I handed him my phone. "I need you to take pictures for me. I can feel it, but it's difficult for me to see the contusions on the back of my leg."

He turned on all the lights in the room.

I twisted my hips, but the angle was still awkward.

"If it's not too painful, it might be easier for you to lie on your stomach."

Awkward.

He helped me shift the pillows, and I turned over. The faster I exposed my backside, the quicker we could accomplish the goal.

"Are you sure it isn't broken? It's a myriad of colors, Doc." He snapped pictures quickly with my phone. "I have it from all sides, it's swelling quickly."

I turned myself back over. He put the pillows under both legs.

Mara came in with a small tub of ice. Abigail and two women followed her.

“It’s swelling quickly.” Ewan took the tub of ice from Mara and the towel. Without instruction, he put the towel on the bed and then put the tub on it. After placing another towel on top of the ice, he put my leg on it.

“Whoa. Cold.”

“This is what the physio does when we hurt ourselves playing futbol,” Ewan said.

“Your physio is right.”

“I’ll put a timer on. Twenty minutes on and off.” Abigail put another pillow under my knee that had been dislocated. She held a bottle of pills and a glass of water. “For inflammation.”

The other women who had followed my friends into the room put down two trays of food and coffee on the table by the door. Then they left.

After taking the meds, I took a hard look at the photos Ewan had taken with my phone. He hadn’t lied about the weight of the gargoyle. Even though it had barely nicked me, it had done some damage.

If I hadn’t fallen forward, more of my body, possibly my brain, would have been harmed.

Chalk one up for the klutz.

I shivered from the cold. Mara put a warm blanket around my shoulders.

“Thanks.”

Abigail lifted my leg from the ice and cleaned off the blood that had coagulated on my calf.

“What do you think?”

“Abrasions and severe contusions. We need an X-ray,” Abigail said as she dabbed my leg with alcohol. Even through the cold, the sting of antiseptic burned.

“I felt for breaks and there weren’t any.”

“Hairlines,” she said.

“Could be, but I think it hit the flesh and not the bone. I was lucky.”

“I wouldna say that.” Ewan sat in a chair near the window. After steepling his fingers, he leaned forward. “I don’t like this. It’s purposeful.”

Abigail put my leg back in the ice.

I hissed.

“You think someone pushed it off?” Mara asked. “Henry says it’s heavy enough that he’ll need help moving it.”

“Aye, I think someone pushed it.”

I tried to speak, but my teeth chattered.

“Distract me.”

“Tell me again, what did you hear right before the gargoyle fell?” Ewan asked.

I’d already answered this question, but I appreciated the distraction. I closed my eyes.

“Someone was on the balcony. Something clattered.”

“Any idea what it was?” Abigail asked.

“Metal hitting the tile,” I said.

“That’s very specific,” he said.

“In the ER, you get used to the sound. If you flinch every time something hits the floor, you look like an idiot. You get used to it, but you don’t forget it.”

“I’ll check with Henry to see if he found anything metal.”

“I had a tough time figuring out where the sound came from because I was watching the snow come down. The glass made it seem like the noise was far away. I checked the balcony but didn’t see anything. Still, I had a sense someone might be watching me.”

“Were there footsteps, maybe heavy or light ones?” he asked.

“No. The clattering was the only noise except for the snow falling, the wind, and the lambs in the pen. They bleated a bit.” I’d forgotten that last bit.

“What happened next?”

“My spidey senses kicked in,” I said, as if that was perfectly logical.

“Spidey senses?”

“Spider-Man,” Abigail said. “Thanks to the doc, we all use the term for when those instincts kick in and you sense someone is around or something may be wrong.”

“I see,” Ewan said. From the tone in his voice, it was clear he did not.

“Is it possible someone followed you out there?” Ewan asked. “Perhaps someone you spoke to after the practice? You mentioned Caleb and Tiffany.”

Anyone else?"

I shrugged. "I didn't speak to anyone else. I listened to snippets of conversations, but theirs was the most interesting."

"What did they say?" Mara asked.

Ewan waved a hand. "They made accusations against each other. She can tell you later. Anyone else?"

"No. If he hadn't bumped into me accidentally, I wouldn't have talked to Caleb. I should have been more careful.

"But he knows you were snooping," Abigail said. "He may have been strong enough to push that gargoyle onto you. We need to know what he said, and Ewan, we are all involved in this. Information is important."

Abigail could be quite bossy when needed.

Ewan held up his hands in surrender, and then he leaned back in his chair.

I told my friends what I'd heard.

"Tiffany is still at the top of the list," Mara said. "It makes sense for her to have brought Robbie here to get back at Angie. Ewan, it was premeditated. Why don't you just arrest her and save us all the trouble."

"Evidence," Ewan and I said at the same time.

"What we have now is circumstantial and hearsay. My men checked her room carefully—and her car. They found nothing. She'd need to stash the gear and Robbie's things somewhere."

"I admit they are good suspects," I said. "But every time I see Caleb, he's either drunk or high. I can't see him being of sound enough mind to do something like this."

"Besides, he was still in jail, right?" Abigail said. "Henry said Caleb was one of the last to arrive. They also checked his room and car and didn't find anything."

I raised my eyebrow but didn't say anything. She sat on the end of the bed. Mara handed me a cup of tea and then sat next to me.

"It doesn't have to be someone from the dance," Mara said.

"You're right. It could have been anyone. Maybe the killers weren't expecting a coroner to be on the premises," I said. "If we hadn't tested the body immediately, there's a good chance the poison would have dissipated.

Many things, including different types of kidney disease could cause crystalizing like we found.

“The gargoyle could have been an accident. The avalanches could have jarred it out of place.” Even as I said the words, I didn’t believe them.

“That gargoyle was heavy,” Ewan said. “We’re looking at someone extremely strong.”

“Damien isn’t fit enough,” Abigail said.

There was a knock on the door.

Abigail opened it.

Henry stood on the other side, shifting from foot to foot.

“Is the doc all right?”

“Yes,” Ewan said. Did you find him?”

Henry’s eyes opened wider. “How did you know, sir?”

“What?” Ewan frowned.

“That it was a male.”

“Weight of the gargoyle. So, did you find him?”

“No, sir. But we do have a footprint of sorts. Male, size forty-two, sir.”

“That won’t narrow down things much, as it’s the most popular shoe size for men,” Ewan said. “Was there any sort of tread?”

Those were things I didn’t know and wouldn’t have thought to ask. I had so much to learn about crime solving.

“No, sir. It was more an outline of dust on one side, but I’ve taken pictures.” He held up his phone.

“You and Angus start questioning our male guests. Find out where they were in the last hour.”

“They’ll hardly confess,” I said.

He sighed. “I’m not expecting a confession, but we can corroborate their movements with other guests. It’s called detective work.”

I may have rolled my eyes. Okay, I did roll my eyes. I was the first one to admit my detective skills were lacking.

“I’m not the one who slid making me the coroner into the fine print.” It was half joke and the other part truth. One of the first things I’d discovered when I moved to Sea Isle was that I was coroner as well as the town doctor. I’d been annoyed about the former at first, but now I quite liked the work.

Except that time the murderer took my digging into the case personally and tried to kill me.

And now it had happened again.

My hands shook, and it had nothing to do with the ice.

Ewan ran a hand through his hair. I'd only known him a few months, but I knew he did that when he was frustrated.

"It was not in the fine print. You should have read the contract carefully."

Mara and Abigail hooted with laughter.

My lips may have quirked up on the right side. I liked giving him a hard time, but that wasn't exactly one-sided.

"Get the kit and do a cast," he said.

"But sir."

Ewan cleared his throat. "I don't care how much of it you can get—we need evidence. You can't just think about catching the killer; we must build a case."

"Yes, sir."

Henry left quickly. I wasn't the only one learning criminal investigation from Ewan.

"Will you be, okay?" Ewan stood. "I need to follow up on some interviews." His voice was brusque.

"Thank you for helping me. I'm good."

He hesitated.

"We've got her," Mara said. "We won't leave her alone."

When he'd left, Abigail sat in the chair where he'd been. She drank her tea.

"Is Tommy doing well? I was worried about him this morning."

"Aye," she said. "The gardeners are keeping him busy and have him covered for the next few hours."

"I was surprised he wasn't in the pen with the lambs. There was no one else in the gardens," I said.

"They were all at lunch with the rest of the staff," Mara said. "I'd gone to check on Jasper and saw him at a corner table with one of the gardeners, eating."

“Tommy is covered; tell us what you need us to do for the case,” Abigail said.

I shook my head. “No. Someone may have tried to kill me today. You two will not put your lives in danger.”

Mara snorted. “We are stuck in a castle with a killer. The faster we figure it out, the sooner we’ll all be safe.”

“Killers,” I said.

“So, you think there are two?” Abigail said. “Or is it three?”

“Tommy saw a woman yelling at Robbie,” I said. “Ewan says it would have to be someone quite strong to push that gargoyle off the balcony. A woman might have done it, but I don’t think so. Robbie was up to no good, but we have no way of knowing if he was in on this.”

“You said before that the killer is smart,” Abigail chimed in. “I agree. I can’t see the person who clumsily shoved that gargoyle off using antifreeze to kill someone. That takes knowledge of chemistry.”

“That’s it.” I snapped my fingers.

Mara jumped. “Sorry—I might have dozed off. What happened?”

We laughed.

“Abigail gave me a great idea. We need to find out who might know chemistry. Maybe they worked at a pharmacy—I mean, a chemist’s.”

“Some of Damien’s friends are rugby types, but I talked to a chemist today,” Mara said. “He was sweet, and no killer.”

“How do you know?” Abigail asked. “I mean, if you just met him. Is he here with one of the women?”

“Not that I can tell,” Mara said. “He mainly hangs out with his friends. We were paired up at the ceilidh. He’s not much of a dancer, but easy on the eyes.”

“There’s a dentist,” Abigail added. “I dunnae know his name, though. Henry was talking about him. He and Ewan. They were going down the list of guests in the kitchen.”

“We need that list. It has pictures, right?”

Abigail nodded. “Room numbers and pictures.”

“You could show it to Tommy. He might be able to identify the woman who yelled at Robbie.”

She shook her head. “If Tommy says no face, it means he didn’t look up. Ever since we lived with my uncle, any hint of conflict and he—”

“Checks out,” I said.

“Yes. I’m sorry. We can try, but he won’t be able to tell you about her face. He saw her hair, but more than half the women here have dark hair.”

“He doesn’t forget much. Do you think he might remember her voice?”

“How would we do that?” Mara asked.

“I don’t know. I haven’t figured that part out yet.”

I shifted gears. “Mara, can you flirt with some of the other groomsmen? Let’s focus on men who could have pushed that gargoyle off the ledge.”

“Flirt with possible psychopaths. Check.”

Abigail giggled. Then she popped up and put my leg back in the ice.

I hissed again.

“I don’t like it when you do that.”

She laughed again. “I know—it makes it more fun.”

“Masochist,” I said.

She scrunched up her face. “What do you need me to do?” Abigail said.

“We need a way Tommy can stay on the periphery of the group when they are all together. I don’t want to traumatize him in any way, but maybe if he can recognize the voice? Never mind. As I say it out loud, it’s dumb.”

“Do you remember that episode of *Midsomer Murders*,” Mara said, “the one where it was two different killers, but it took them most of the episode to figure it out?”

I shook my head. “But go on.”

“Maybe one of the steps killed Robbie. He showed up to make trouble, and they took care of him. They are a protective lot. Or some of Damien’s friends forced that antifreeze down Robbie’s throat. Yuck. That’s a bad visual.

“Anyway. We’re looking for a separate set of killers. Like you keep saying, it doesn’t make sense that Robbie was killed before he could cause trouble. That’s the part we can’t seem to get around.

“But there is a sinister plot to stop the wedding. It’s probably spearheaded by the father-in-law. He’s hired two hench people, and one of them is a woman. The other must be a man. If we divide the crimes, it might

make it easier to solve one of them.”

I didn't remember the episode of *Midsomer Murders* she spoke about. “You have a point,” I said.

“We all think Tiffany is involved,” I said. “She's a bit off and has serious issues, but I can't see her as a henchwoman.”

“Right, but she could have helped sneak in the victim,” Abigail said.

I didn't disagree.

“But she works at a bank,” I said. “I'm not seeing a chemistry connection. She might have become jealous with Robbie's plan and poisoned him, but like we keep saying, that took knowledge.”

“I know what you're saying,” Abigail added. “But she could have looked it up on the internet. Type in easy ways to poison someone in a search, and I bet antifreeze would come up. It's easy to transport, and you can find it just about anywhere. Except he was the one carrying it.”

I pursed my lips. “I feel like we keep going over the same things, but we aren't any closer.”

“Think about it, though,” Abigail said. “Maybe it was his idea to come here. That might have made her angry enough to kill him.”

“He could have changed his mind,” Mara added. “That would have made her really mad.”

“I've been thinking it was the groom's family because of their dislike of Angie, but you're right. A woman scorned and all that.”

“We should watch her at the gift ceremony tonight,” Abigail said.

“Gift ceremony?”

“You need to read your itinerary,” Mara said.

“I saw it—I just didn't know what it meant.”

“It's a Scottish tradition,” Abigail added. “The bride and groom, and the maid of honor and best man, all exchange gifts. Then the bride and groom open their gifts from closest family and friends.”

“If there is any sort of jealousy, we should see it on Tiffany's face,” Mara said. “And it's a big circle, so it will be easy to watch everyone.”

“It's odd none of the stepmoms brought their significant others. At least two of them are married. I remember Angie saying that.”

“Eh. Would you want to go to a wedding for the daughter of your wife's

ex?” I asked.

“You have a point,” Mara said. “Then again, maybe they are coming for the ceremony. I’m not sure I’d want to hang out with the family of my ex for four days before the wedding.”

“I’ve already spoken with her mom and the second stepmom. I’ll focus on who killed Robbie. You two keep an eye out for any of our players who might have wanted to cause our favorite couple harm. Remember, we are just observing and having casual conversations.”

“Time to take your leg out,” Abigail said.

My leg was so numb, I couldn’t feel it. Probably a good thing, given the swelling.

“Thank you, both,” I said. “I’m not sure how I’d survive without the two of you.

“We’d do anything for you,” Mara said. “You have to know that.”

I smiled. I’d had friends in my life, but none as fast and wonderful as these two.

“I’m going to chat up the staff,” Mara said. “They see more than anyone else around here. I’ve become friends with some of them. It’s amazing what a bit of kindness can do when you’re serving posh people.”

I was about to agree when the door slammed open, and we all screamed.

Chapter Twelve

Jasper stomped into the room. “Someone tried to kill you,” he said angrily. Then he glanced at my leg and the ice. “Why didn’t you tell me? I heard the kitchen staff talking about someone killing the doctor. I nearly had a heart attack. Have you figured out who it is? I’ll murder them myself!”

I burst out laughing and so did our friends.

“What?” Jasper stared at us as if we’d lost our minds. Maybe we had. These days had been weird. The last thing I’d expected at Angie’s wedding was murder, attempted murder, and bodily harm.

“You scared us to death,” Abigail said. Then she giggled.

We needed a bit of stress relief.

“Is it broken?” He moved toward the bed and looked down at my leg in the tub of ice.

“Not as far as we can tell.” I smiled at him. “I’m okay,” I said.

He put a hand against his chest. “One of the kitchen staff said someone threw a gargoyle off the roof at you. But they didn’t know if you were alive. What happened?”

Mara explained.

“Is your leg going to be all right?” He sat down in the chair where Abigail had been.

“Yes,” I said. “It will be sore for a bit, though.”

“Tell me what you need.”

“Macarons,” Mara said quickly.

This time Jasper joined the laughter.

“I just made some fresh ones for tonight’s event. You can be my taste testers.”

“Happy to help,” I said. “You could keep an ear out with the kitchen staff, and let us know if anyone has seen anything odd. At this point, Ewan has talked to everyone, but he’s the big boss. They might be more willing to talk to you all.”

“We need to know if anyone saw someone up on that balcony in the covered garden,” Abigail said. “It’s a big castle, but we have so many people here. They may not have realized what they saw. There are several rooms that open out onto that balcony.”

“True.”

“I’ll bring you some sweets and sandwiches,” he said. “Anything else?”

“Coffee,” I said. “It already feels like a very long day.”

“It wouldn’t hurt for you to rest a bit,” Abigail said. “I feel as if I should stay and look after her,” she said to Mara. “Can you check on Tommy for me?”

“That isn’t necessary,” I said. “I’ll rest better on my own.”

“What if you need the ladies?” Abigail asked. She had a point. I wasn’t sure how I’d be walking on my own.

“Go check on Tommy. I’ll be okay for a bit,” I said. “Mara can help me until you get back. Feel free to bring Tommy with you if need be.”

I went through the pictures Ewan took of my leg. Since the leg was frozen, it was a good time to examine it. I pressed gently as I made my way down the bone.

As I neared my ankle, at the lower part of the calf, I hissed. It wasn’t broken, but the inflammation was severe.

I’d be stumbling about for a while, but I’d live.

My hands shook.

Someone had tried to scare me or kill me. I’d been brave in front of my friends. I didn’t want them to worry.

Hiding in my room and locking the door had a certain appeal.

★ ★ ★

After an early dinner, I used a cane Ewan had given me, to get around, and Jasper’s shoulder to make it to the exchange of gifts. This was part of the bridal ceremony, but everyone was dressed casually.

Abigail had wrapped the leg, to help keep the swelling down. If I never saw another tub of ice, I'd be happy. The good news was that, as disgusting as the bruising looked, the cold had kept the swelling to a minimum, although I'd be soaking it again before bed, and off and on for the next twenty-four hours.

The room we'd been in the night before had been rearranged. The snow still beat against the windows, but I tried not to notice. For some reason, the wintry weather banged against my nerves like steel claws on a chalkboard.

Snow like this wasn't unusual here. I had to get used to it.

Maybe it was being trapped with a killer.

Any good therapist would advise me to distract myself. I focused on the crowd. The sofas and chairs had been moved into a circle. The bride's and groom's chairs were decorated in an array of flowers. There were several tables of gifts behind them.

I took one of the cushioned chairs with an ottoman so I could keep my legs up. Even with the soft cushioning, the bruising on my calf was tender. Mara sat on one side, and Abigail on the other. Jasper sat next to Mara.

"Any news," I whispered as people sat down.

"I have some gossip, but not here," Mara said.

"I do as well," Abigail said. She put a hand up to hide her mouth from the crowd. "Keep an eye on Tiffany's reactions. She was seen by two of the staff near the garages the day Robbie was killed."

"And the groom has some answering to do," Jasper said. "No one remembers him being at the stag after one."

I frowned. We'd talked to Damien and Angie, and he hadn't mentioned leaving. Why did we keep coming back to the same people?

Motive.

No one had more at stake than the groom.

Damien was as nice as they came, but I wasn't sure how far he'd go for Angie.

"Oh my," a woman said from beside me. I glanced up to find one of the stepmothers staring down with a worried look on her face. "Are you quite done in?"

I'd lived in Scotland long enough to understand her, though her brogue

was heavy. She was much younger than the others, so I assumed she was the current wife of Angie's father.

"I'll be fine," I said. "Just a bit of bruising."

"Lucky you." She shook her head. "Or maybe not. With things falling out of the air, that is. I'm beginning to wonder if any of us are safe. Even with the constable here, it's a bit much."

Ewan had wanted to keep the accident quiet, so of course everyone in the castle seemed to know.

"May I ask what you heard?"

"That someone shoved a gargoyle on you, and you almost died." She shook her head again. "I bet it scared the life out of you."

"It's an old castle," I said. "Things happen. It probably just fell. Those avalanches shook the place hard."

Her eyebrow rose. "I heard a boot print was found. Be careful—they might not miss the next time."

It was the way she said it that surprised me more than anything.

"Ta," she said with a quick wave.

What had she meant by that? Was she someone concerned? Or the killer?

Now I was the one imagining things. What reason would she have for keeping Angie and Damien apart?

None. No motive. Move on.

A bagpiper played, and it was all I could do not to jump at that first note. Breathing deeply, I turned my head to watch the bride and groom come in while the piper played. When they reached the back of the decorated chairs, two of the groomsmen bowed and then made a ceremony out of making way for the bride and groom to enter the circle.

Everyone clapped as the pair entered together. When they sat, the piper stopped.

"Presentation to the piper," one of the groomsmen shouted. He handed the bagpiper an envelope and a small, wrapped box.

The man nodded to the groomsmen, though he did not dip his head too far. His furry hat would have fallen off.

"Presentation to the bride," another groomsman shouted.

"That's the dentist," Mara whispered. "I talked with him at dinner. He

and Damien were friends at university, and he adores Angie. He believes she's the best thing that ever happened to his friend. He's very kind."

He was handsome and smiling jovially at the couple.

After making some wavy arms with his hands, he clicked his heels together and turned with military precision.

Everyone laughed.

The stepmoms were laughing—except for the current one. She wore a smirk, as if she deemed the groomsmen's behavior silly.

Interesting.

I wasn't sure how much of this was a traditional part of the gift-giving ceremony or the men of the wedding party were having a bit of fun.

Damien pulled a red Cartier box from the back pocket of his jeans.

Angie gasped. "I told you no more jewelry. I don't need things like that from you."

Her tartan-making business was quite successful, and she'd always been mindful of her fiancé's wealth. She didn't want people thinking she wanted to marry him for his money.

"It's tradition, luv." He opened the box.

Her hand flew against her chest. "A Luckenbooth." She sniffed.

"What is it?" I whispered.

"A heart-shaped brooch, but he's put it on a diamond necklace."

Tears streamed down Angie's cheeks as she held it up. Even in the low mood lighting of the room, the necklace shimmered. She turned and Damien put it around her neck.

"You have my heart; now you're wearing it."

Whew. I hoped he wasn't guilty of murder. He loved her so much.

She turned back and they kissed. It went on a bit long for such a big audience.

Mr. Carthage cleared his throat. It was the first time I'd noticed he'd arrived. He'd missed out on several of the events. He did wear a scowl on his face, so there was that.

Angie's mom and stepmothers twittered over the gift. Even the one I'd been watching winked at Angie. Maybe I'd misread her.

"Presentation from the bride to the groom," another groomsman boomed.

Half of us jumped. He did a twirl and leapt like a ballerina before sashaying back to his seat.

The room bubbled with laughter.

“Is that a part of this ritual?” I asked.

“Nay,” Abigail said. “They’re having a bit of fun with it.”

“The dentist said they had plans to make everyone laugh tonight,” Mara added. “They wanted to get the wedding festivities back on track and have a bit of fun.”

“It’s working.” I shifted in my seat.

Tiffany smiled as she handed Angie two big boxes. The grin was genuine. After setting the boxes in Angie’s lap, the two women hugged. Tiffany kissed her cheek.

When Tiffany sat down, she smiled again.

“Gah. Why does she look so happy? This doesn’t make sense,” Mara said.

“I was thinking the same thing. Seems like she is happy to be a part of the whole thing. That was genuine.”

“You’re right. Maybe we have it all wrong.”

Marianne wasn’t smiling, though. She appeared closer to tears. She’d pulled the cuffs of her bulky beige sweater over her hands, one of which was fisted.

“What’s this?” Damien shook the box Angie handed to him. He smiled at her.

“Not quite as glamorous as what you gave me, but it is also from the heart.”

He made a big deal of opening the first box. Then he pulled out a beautiful white shirt. Even from a distance, it was easy to see the fine fabric.

“That’s the traditional shirt to go with your kilt.”

“Did you make this?” Damien asked in awe.

The sweetness of the moment, caught in my throat. He was every bit as excited over the shirt as she had been about the necklace.

Angie had nabbed a good one, and I couldn’t see him as a killer. A guy who appreciated handiwork like that. However, I didn’t mentally cross him off the list quite yet.

“Aye, I did.”

“It’s quite fine, luv, quite fine.” There was no mistaking he meant every word.

He put the shirt over his shoulder.

She handed him another box.

“This was enough, luv.”

Angie smiled at him. “Open it.”

He opened the other box and pulled out layers of tartan. This gift I recognized as a very fine kilt.

“Oh, luv, it’s our clan. It’s perfect. So beautiful, my love. Thank you.”

He put the kilt back in the box and then pulled his bride into his arms.

Once again the father-in-law cleared his throat.

Everyone laughed at him.

I’m not sure I’d ever seen two people more in love.

“Presentation from the groomsmen,” another one of them yelled. He did jumping jacks and then a burpee. The crowd howled with laughter and applauded his efforts.

The groomsmen had been correct. Everyone needed this night of levity.

The gift was a beautiful brass and glass clock.

“Traditional gift,” Abigail said from beside me. She looked at her watch. “I need to check on Tommy,” she said. “I’ll find you later.”

She left, and the gift giving went on for a few more hours. My knee and calf ached by the time everything was finished. While everyone gathered for cocktails at the other end of the room, I decided to head back to my room to ice my leg.

Abigail met me at the door, tears streaming down her face.

“What’s wrong?”

“I can’t find him.” She sobbed.

“Who?”

“Tommy,” she said. “He saw the killer and now he’s missing.”

Oh. No.

Chapter Thirteen

I waved Mara and Jasper over. They took one look at Abigail and asked, “What happened?” at the same time.

“Tommy’s gone,” I said. “Where was he last seen?”

“In the carriage house where we are staying. Elizabeth had been looking after him, but she was needed in the kitchen. There was a problem with the prep for tomorrow.” She hiccupped a sob. Abigail had been through so much, but I’d never seen her cry. My heart twisted in my chest. “She left him playing his video games and was only gone for a half hour. When she came back ...

“If he’s out in this weather ...”

I pulled her into my arms and squeezed hard. “He’s a smart young man,” I said. “We’ll find him. Take a deep breath. Did you check the garden where he made a home for the lamb?”

She nodded.

“Did you tell Ewan?” Mara asked.

“No one can find him,” she said.

“That’s good, right?” Jasper asked. “Ewan is probably looking after him somewhere.”

“I’ve looked everywhere they might be for hours,” she said.

What if they were in trouble? I didn’t voice my fears. Calm heads were needed.

“How about Henry?”

“He and the other officer are checking the outbuildings near the house. The snow—there isn’t much use looking outside. It’s my fault. I shouldn’t have left his care to someone else. He’s my responsibility.”

My stomach roiled with nerves. I loved Tommy and Abigail. They'd become family to me.

I forced myself to be calm. "Stop. You deserve a break now and again. And Elizabeth is great with him. You know that. Tommy's probably off doing something he believes to be very important."

Normally, that would mean he'd been in the garden. Flowers were his biggest passion. That, and animals.

"Right. Abigail, it could be you just missed each other. Maybe he went to check on the lamb, and you passed each other without realizing it. Go check the carriage house again.

"Jasper, you and Mara check the garages connected to the castle. I'll check the garden and the kitchen again."

"You need to rest and get off that leg," Abigail said.

"I'm fine." Crazy how adrenaline hid pain, and it coursed through my system. "Tommy is family. We will find him."

Abigail's eyes filled with tears.

"Time for that later." I patted her cheek. "Let's get on with it."

The staff in the kitchen repeated what they'd said to Abigail, although they mentioned Elizabeth was beside herself. They'd all been searching downstairs.

I checked in the room where Jasper had been working on the pastries and cakes. The damage that had been done to the top layers had already been fixed. Jasper was a wonder when it came to baked goods and patisserie.

I shut the door to the room tightly.

Right. Moving on.

I headed out to the garden. I used the cane as I walked through the paths. The snow still fell heavily on the domed roof, and I prayed he wasn't outside anywhere.

Something or someone moved near the pen where the small lamb was kept.

"Tommy? Is that you?"

Eerie silence greeted me.

"It's okay, I'm not upset," I said. "But Abigail is worried about you. We need to get you back to the carriage house.

Most of the lighting was on the footpath and the area where the pen had been made was in the dark.

Great.

The last time I'd been out here and there was a noise, someone had tossed a gargoyle at me.

At least I had a cane and was out of range for the remaining gargoyles.

Pulling my phone from my pocket, I turned on its flashlight. Nothing was in the pen.

Okay, Tommy had to be with the lamb somewhere.

The heavy snow on the dome made it darker than the other night. Some of it had started sticking to the glass. My earlier accident made the beautiful garden creepier.

Tommy didn't always respond to verbal cues, so it was necessary to check every path. When I neared the balcony on the far right, I glanced up. No noises up there, but I was wary of going too close. I used my phone to check the area.

There were no movements or sound. I cut through the middle and did the next path. By the time I was finished, my calf muscle was tight against my jeans, having swollen twice its normal size. I went back in through the kitchen, so I didn't have to worry about the balcony.

Most of the staff was off searching.

"Any luck?" one of the dishwashers asked. "I canna help look now, but will when my shift is done." She was young and wore her dreads piled on top of her head.

"Thank you. We may take you up on that if we don't find him sooner."

"He makes me laugh," she said. "He's a sweet boy."

"He is." My estimation of her character was rather high. Not everyone appreciated people who are neuro-diverse. Tommy was exceptional and we had to find him.

Where would he take the lamb?

I'd have expected to find him sleeping outside with the poor animal.

My knee gave out, and I grabbed the wall before I fell. I'd probably been putting more weight on the side that had been dislocated, because the other side hurt worse.

At the very least, I needed something to take for the pain. I'd ice it later. Making the trek down the long hall, was like one of those movies where it looked longer than it was.

A door slammed, and the muscles in my shoulders tightened. Slowly, I made my way down the hall.

There was shouting behind one of the doors.

"You need to keep your wits about you," said a male voice. "If you ruin this for me, I will never forgive you."

I couldn't hear the other person in the room.

"Right, well drinking so much you're off your face isn't helping."

I leaned in to put my ear nearer the door.

"I've done everything for you," a woman said. The voice sounded familiar, but I couldn't place it. "If it weren't for me, nothing would have been done."

"What are you doing?" Ewan's voice boomed behind me.

I jumped and then screamed. To top it off, I fell forward, and was only saved from slamming into the wood floor by his quick hands.

He grabbed the waist of my jeans and pulled me into his hard chest.

The door flew open, and Angie's current stepmom stood there. "Is everything all right? I heard a scream."

Ewan cleared his throat but didn't let go of me.

"The doc lost her footing. You aren't supposed to be walking around on that leg," he chastised.

I sighed.

He was helping me to save face.

"It's for a good reason," I said. "Tommy is missing."

"Tommy?" she asked.

"He's young and neuro-divergent," I said, as if that explained everything.

She cocked her head. "I haven't seen any children around here at all," she said. "Let me know if I can help."

Before I could figure out a way to ask who was in the room with her, she stepped in and then closed the door.

Odd there was man in there, since Angie's dad hadn't made it up before the storm.

Who could it be?

Before I could tell Ewan to knock on the door, he heaved me over his shoulder like a fireman, my butt in the air.

“I’d complain and beg you to put me down, but my knee is killing me,” I said.

“Did you mean what you said about Tommy?”

“Yes. Abigail has been looking for hours and hasn’t been able to find him. The lamb is also gone.”

“Blimey,” he said. “We need to put together a search party.”

“I’ve tried. Abigail is retracing her steps, and Jasper, Henry, and Mara are helping as well. I think your other officers are searching the castle.”

“Why wasn’t someone with him?” His voice had an edge. He cared for Tommy and Abigail every bit as much as I did.

“Elizabeth was called to the kitchen. She thought he’d be fine with his video games for a few minutes. When she returned, he was gone.”

“Who called her to the kitchen?”

“I don’t know,” I said.

“She’s overseeing the house, but I’ve arranged for her main job to be looking after Tommy. He’s comfortable with her, and Abigail needs a break.”

“I agree. She never complains, but she deserves a life.”

“Exactly. I want her to have a life and to meet people her age. I’d hoped being in a social setting would help.

“Bugger all. She’ll be upset.”

I smiled. A bear of a man, he had a good heart.

We reached the door, and a large wail came from inside my room.

“Stay,” Ewan ordered, as he leaned me against the wall.

Then he burst through the door, and the wails grew louder.

“Get away from him,” Ewan growled.

What was going on?

I used the last of my strength, and the cane, to hurl myself into the room.

The low lamplight made it difficult to see all the players. Tommy held the lamb in his arms near the fireplace. On the other side of the room, Ewan had Caleb, Damien’s brother, against the wall, his forearm on Caleb’s throat. The other man grew pale.

“I wasn’t hurting him,” Caleb spit out through gasping breath.

“What are you doing in here?” Ewan’s anger was palpable. He didn’t let the man down.

“If you remove your arm from his throat, it may be easier for him to speak,” I offered softly.

“If he drops the candlestick he threatened Tommy with, I’ll consider it.”

The silver candlestick hit the wood floor.

“Stay,” Ewan said fiercely to the other man. “Doc, check on Tommy.”

The young man whimpered near the fireplace.

I limped around the sofa and coffee table. Standing a few feet away, I forced a smile on my face.

“You’re safe, Tommy. Everything is okay.”

“Nooo.” He sniffed. Standing next to the fireplace he rocked back and forth.

“No one will hurt you. I promise. See, Ewan’s here.”

He continued rocking back and forth. “Nooooo,” he cried out again.

“That cry—that’s why I came in,” said Caleb. “I heard someone cry out like they were hurt. I thought the killer was after him.”

I didn’t believe anything that came out of Caleb’s mouth. He was too smooth and not at all the type to be heroic.

“Really?” I asked.

His eyes widened.

“I haven’t known you long, but ‘heroic’ is not how I’d describe you.”

“Harsh,” Caleb said. “Even I will stop for a crying child.”

“Didn’t cry. I’m not a baby. He came in to hurt us,” Tommy said. He was nearly six feet, and nineteen years old.

“You’re an adult,” I said. “We believe you.”

“You can’t believe that—he’s not right in the head.”

Ewan pressured the man’s neck with his forearm again. “That boy is smarter than you and me put together. You’ll not speak ill of him again.” The rumble of fury in Ewan’s voice sent goose bumps down my arms.

Tommy whimpered again.

“Ewan, it might be best to remove Caleb from the room so I can find out why Tommy is here. Also, send someone to find Abigail.

“I couldn’t find her,” Ewan said. “I tried.”

I had to set my curiosity aside, because I too wanted to know what Caleb was doing in Mara’s and my room. But Tommy needed me more.

Ewan shoved the other man out of the room.

When they left, I turned on a few more lights, to better assess the situation.

“Bad man.” Tommy continued rocking.

“He’s gone. He won’t hurt you or your friend. I’m going to sit down on the sofa. When you are ready, why don’t you sit down as well.”

I sat down and waited. Pushing him to explain would set him off. For the most part, he was even-tempered and calm. But like many neuro-divergent humans, small things or anything outside his routine might set him off.

“Sick,” he said.

“You are sick?”

“Nooooo.”

I glanced at the animal in his arm. “The lamb?”

“Yes. Sick in his pen.”

“And you brought him here, looking for me?”

“He’s sick.”

It would do no good to explain that I was not a vet. There wasn’t one around. Ewan would know much more about what to do with a sick lamb than I.

“Tommy, I’ll need to examine him. I need a towel from the loo.” I would have grabbed it, but my knee throbbed.

Carrying the lamb, he did as I asked.

After he handed me the towel, I spread it on the sofa beside me.

“Put it him down on his side.”

The animal was either tired or lethargic, as it didn’t seem to care.

After giving it a cursory exam to look for any external injuries, I leaned over to sniff. The smell of sick was evident.

A tiny lamb living on mother’s milk was much like a human baby. If he’d ingested something that wasn’t normal, it could have adverse effects. I needed Ewan’s help. Or the help of one of his herders. But I couldn’t leave, nor could I send Tommy out in search of them.

“When the lamb was in the kitchen, did it eat any of the cake it knocked over?”

Tommy sat there for a minute, petting the lamb’s head. He wasn’t one for quick answers when asked a direct question.

That wasn’t such a bad thing. More than once in my life, I wished I’d been more careful with the words I’d said.

“Yes. Icing fell. But not much.”

“Right. And the sick in the pen. Was it a lot or a little?”

We sat for more than minute.

“Little,” he said.

“Okay, I think he’s fine. My guess—and it is a guess, because we need to speak to one of the shepherds—it’s one of two things. The small amount of sugar from the icing may have made him sick. Or we need to adjust the formula you’re feeding him.”

A tear slid down Tommy’s cheek.

Those who believed people who are neuro-divergent didn’t have emotions were wrong. Tommy was one of the brightest and most sensitive souls I’d ever met.

The door slid open, and Abigail, Mara, and Jasper came in slowly. Ewan must have warned them Tommy was upset.

“Tommy,” Abigail said gently, “I’ve been worried.”

He looked up and made eye contact with her, something he didn’t do often. “The baby is sick,” he said.

The anguish in his tone was enough to make my heart a bit squishy.

“Right, Doc?”

I repeated what I’d said to Tommy. “Can someone find Ewan or one of the herders?”

“On it,” Jasper said, as if he were grateful to find something to do. Our favorite baker was every bit as emotional as Tommy.

★ ★ ★

By the time Ewan reappeared, Abigail had found hot chocolate for her brother, ice for my leg, and some pain meds.

“The wee one needs hydration,” he said. “I’ll help you, Tommy.”

“Did Caleb say anything?”

“No. He claims he heard Tommy wailing. Henry’s watching him. Don’t worry.”

“He wanted to hurt us,” Tommy said.

“Were you crying before he came in?” I asked.

There was a long pause. Direct questions were difficult for Tommy. If you asked him to do something, and were clear with instructions, he had no problem. But answering questions was more difficult. It took longer because of the way he processed information.

“No. We were quiet. The bad man came in and went through Doctor’s things. I protected the baby.”

Ah. The scene became clearer in my mind.

“You did a great job.” I patted the lamb. “I’m with Tommy. We must look at ulterior motives.”

“Let me get him and the lamb settled,” Ewan said. “Lock the door after me.”

Abigail followed him out. I had a feeling she’d be sticking like glue to her brother.

“So much drama,” Mara said. She sat on the other end of the sofa and put her feet up. “I’m not going to lie. My heart has been in my throat the last hour. I’ve been so worried about Tommy. He’s such a great kid, and all sorts of horrible things have been running through my head. I didn’t realize how much I care about him until tonight.

“Abigail was so calm with him. She has a world of patience.”

“She’s had many years learning how his mind works. If she came in overly emotional, it would have set him off. And recriminations and blame don’t work with him.”

“I could learn a lot from her,” Mara said.

“I have already. Those tear-stained cheeks earlier were the most emotion I’ve ever seen from her. She’s made of calm.”

“So, I heard bits about Caleb. What happened?”

I shook my head. “I walked in a bit after Ewan. From what I saw, he’d been brandishing the candlestick at Tommy and the lamb.”

“That guy is such a creep.”

“Agreed.”

“Do you think he came in to kill Tommy because he may have seen something? Or do one of us in?”

“Do you mean me?”

She shrugged. “You are the one with the flying gargoyles. But who knows?”

“What if he was after something?” I asked. “Maybe he thought we had evidence in here?”

“Like what happened in the dungeon?” she asked.

I half expected to hear Ewan say, “Wine cellar.”

“Maybe. If he’s the killer that makes sense. No matter what he says, it’s suspicious that he was in here. Do you remember seeing him at the gift-giving ceremony?”

“Only at the beginning,” she said. “I heard him say he needed the loo, but I don’t remember seeing him after that.”

“An excuse to go exploring, I bet.”

I shifted my calf to fit better on the ice Abigail and Mara had put down for me. It was uncomfortable but necessary to get the swelling down. “There are so many rooms in this place. If he’d been searching for our room ...”

“It would have taken him a while. Maybe he wasn’t after Tommy. Like you said, it could have been evidence he was after,” she said.

“I need to talk to him,” I said.

She snorted. “This is one time you can trust Ewan to take care of things. Besides, your calf is the size of a small flowerpot.”

“There is that. Maybe tomorrow. Caleb’s afraid of Ewan, though, and has a disdain for the police. Maybe he’ll talk to me. I may need your help talking to him tomorrow. My guess is Ewan has decided he’s the culprit. Henry will probably be put on guard for him.”

She pursed her lips. “Abigail may be a better choice in that respect.”

“You’ve noticed?”

“That Henry is googly-eyed over her? Yes. Who could miss it?”

I told her about his bringing baked goods to us at the practice. “But she’s clueless,” I said. “Did you notice how gentle he was with Tommy the other day? He’s a good one. I’m no pro at relationships, but I’m not sure she’s

aware he even likes her.”

“Well, we may have to help them out a bit.”

“Yes. But first, we must solve a murder. Let’s come up with a plan to get Caleb alone.” I steepled my fingers.

All I had to do was get him to admit to either being the killer or working with the person determined to destroy my friend’s wedding.

“I know exactly what to do.”

Chapter Fourteen

Convincing Abigail to distract Henry was the toughest part of the plan. Early the next morning we cornered her in the kitchen. The only way any of this would work was if she helped us.

“I’m not leaving Tommy,” she said. We’d made our way out to the lamb pen.

“I understand,” I said, “which is why you should take Tommy and the lamb with you. Poor Henry has been up all night, watching the door. The least we could do is get him some coffee and breakfast. He’d appreciate the visit, I’m certain.”

“That’s all we’re asking you to do,” Mara added.

“Henry is nice,” Tommy said. “He holds the baby while I feed it. He doesn’t yell. Bad men yell.”

Tommy had suffered abuse by his uncle at a young age and never liked loud voices.

Who did?

As far as I was concerned, Tommy was a great judge of character.

“I don’t want my brother anywhere near that man,” she said.

“Completely sensible, as usual,” I said. “Which is why you will stay outside of the room at all times. Mara scoped it out this morning. There is a table and chair in the hallway. You can give poor, poor Henry a bit of a break.”

Abigail scrunched up her face. “I’m not good chatting people up. I get nervous. Why would Henry want to have breakfast with Tommy and me?”

Mara snorted, and I gave her an evil glare. She made a funny face.

“Because Henry is sweet on you,” Mara said.

The surprise on Abigail's face was priceless.

"Whaaaaat?"

We might as well have told her she was the mother of alien twins.

"Henry is nice," Tommy said again. "He can play chess."

Bless Tommy and his brilliant mind.

Abigail frowned. "Is that why he makes us all those cakes?"

"Cakes are good," Tommy said. "But not for babies." He shook his finger at the lamb, who sniffed his shirt and made a small squeaky sound, as if he didn't agree.

We laughed.

"We just need you to distract him for a short time," I said.

"I can't imagine he'd leave his post," she said. "He's a good policeman."

"He is," I agreed.

"Why can't you just ask to talk to Caleb?" Abigail asked sensibly.

"Ewan won't let us anywhere near him because he's a suspect. A real one, now," Mara added.

"Well, Ewan is right, and I don't want to make him mad. Caleb is dangerous."

"Bad man, bad man," Tommy chimed.

Mara started to say something, but I held up a hand.

"We need the truth," I said. "Ewan has decided Caleb is the bad man, as Tommy says. But not all the pieces fit. I need him to fill in the blanks. He might be more willing to speak to me than the constable."

"Are you ordering me to do it?" she asked.

"No," I said. "If you're that uncomfortable, I would never make you do anything you don't want to, Abigail. Please know that." I took her hands in mine. "You work with me, but we are friends. That comes before anything else."

"I'm not good—with men. You know that."

"Just be yourself," I said.

"You're not going to let this go, are you?"

"I'm trying to find a killer," I said. "It's my job. Ewan is a wonderful constable, but he's also very intimidating. Caleb has been in jail more than once, and he knows his way around police."

“If he’s the killer, you have no reason to be alone with him,” she said.

“Again, sensible,” I said. “Mara will be with me, and Jasper.”

“Jasper isn’t much protection,” Abigail said. “Don’t tell him I said that.”

I smiled. “Please.”

She sighed.

A half hour later, we peeked around the corner as Abigail carried a tray to the door where Henry sat outside.

“I brought you food,” she said in her brusque tone.

Henry smiled up at her. “Thank you, Abigail.” He started to take the tray.

“Nay.” She motioned with the tray toward the small table and chairs midway down the hall.

“Can’t leave my post,” he said.

“Do you like me?” she asked.

I put a hand over my mouth to hide my gasp.

Poor Henry’s mouth opened and closed a few times.

“Yes,” he said. The word squeaked out.

“I didn’t know. We should talk,” she said. Then she headed off down the hall with the tea and breakfast.

Henry followed.

She was smart and distracted him with where to sit while we tried to open the door. It was locked.

Mara produced the housekeeper’s keys she’d nicked earlier.

In a matter of seconds, we were in the room, with the door shut.

“Who’s there? I’m not answering any more questions without my lawyer.”

I cleared my throat. “I came to check on you,” I said. “You were pale last night.”

The room was quite dark, and Mara moved to open the curtain. Not that it helped much. A bucket sat next to him and smelled horrible.

I turned on the side lamp next to the bed.

“Go away,” he said.

I pulled the covers down. He was gray and covered in sweat. His body shook.

I placed a hand on his forehead. “Fever,” I said.

“Has he been poisoned?”

“No,” I said. “Classic withdrawal symptoms,” I said. “Heroin?”

“Fentanyl,” he said.

How he was able to get something like that in Scotland was beyond me. They had much stricter drug laws here. Fentanyl could be found on almost any big-city street corner in the States.

Something clicked in my brain. “Right. That’s why you were in my room.”

He blinked.

“Do you want me to help you?”

He nodded.

“Then tell me the truth.”

“I’m not going to implicate myself.”

“Then I’ll leave. We aren’t supposed to be in here.”

“You’re a doctor—you have to treat me.”

I shrugged.

“Not if she doesn’t know about it,” Mara said. “Let’s go. He deserves to suffer for scaring the wits out of Tommy.”

I stepped away from the bed. “You’re right.”

“Wait,” he said weakly.

We’d made it halfway to the door.

“I didn’t mean to scare him,” he said. “I didn’t see him until I was already in there. I needed a fix. The alcohol wasn’t taking the edge off. I’d heard someone talk about how you had a kit here, and I assumed you’d have painkillers at least.”

For once, I believed him.

“Mara, I need my kit.” She took off, leaving the door open.

“Hold up. Who is there?” Henry was at the door. Abigail was right behind him.

Ever helpful, Jasper pointed at me. “Someone called for the doctor.”

“You shouldn’t be here,” he said. “I must insist you leave.”

“I’m the coroner,” I said. “I came to check on him. No one was here, so I came in. This man has a serious condition and needs to be treated.”

Henry stomped into the room, but at the sight of his prisoner, he took a

step back. “He said he was sick, but I didn’t believe him.”

“Well, it’s the one time he hasn’t lied. If you’ll excuse me, I need to treat him.”

He turned to Abigail. “Did you do this on purpose?”

She appeared confused. “I don’t know what you mean. Did I do what?”

God, bless her. While she was a terrible liar, she was good at appearing innocent.

Henry sighed. “What do you need, Doctor?”

“Mara’s on her way with my kit.”

Abigail glanced around me. “Withdrawal?”

“Yes,” I said. “Opioids.”

She chewed on her lip.

“I’ve got this,” I said. “You don’t have to help.”

“Did he tell you why he scared my brother? Was he there to hurt him?”

I shook my head.

“He was after drugs then,” she said. There was a reason I couldn’t live without her at the practice. She was incredibly bright. It ran in her family.

“Aye,” he said from the bed.

Mara came back out of breath. She handed me the kit.

“Henry, clean out that bucket.

“Abigail, find me a vein.

“Mara, we’ll need clean sheets and towels.”

As I barked orders, everyone ran in different directions. I opened my kit to put a concoction together. I’d dealt with this sort of thing more often than I would like while working in Emergency in Seattle.

I didn’t have exactly what I needed, but Abigail had put together a thorough kit. I could get him through the next twenty-four hours, but I wasn’t sure after that.

“How long and what’s the dose?” I asked. “And be honest. I don’t want to risk killing you.”

“No idea,” he said. “Just white tabs.”

“I don’t suppose you have any left?”

“Nay.”

“When was the last time you had any?”

“Before they picked me up,” he said. “Three days.”

Three days? “You’re lucky you lasted this long.”

“I know. Done it before. Wasn’t quite as sick when I kicked cocaine.”

“Two different drugs.”

That explained why he’d been so drunk all the time. But alcohol would have made him dehydrated, worsening his symptoms.

An hour later, we had him cleaned up and had two IV drips going: one with saline to hydrate him; the other a slow drip to stave off his symptoms until we could get him into a hospital.

“I’m an arse, but I wouldn’t have hurt the kid,” he said. “He surprised me. I grabbed that candlestick to protect myself. There’s an effin’ murderer ’round here.” Then his eyes fluttered shut.

“Is there truth serum in those bags?” Ewan’s voice made me jump. No telling how long he’d been standing at the door.

★ ★ ★

A few hours later, I sat on a couch downstairs, with my legs on an ottoman. Most of the women were gathered in the room where the hen party had been. They were busy stringing flowers together to make huge swags for the wedding.

Most of the flowers would, hopefully, show up on the day of the wedding, but these had been delivered early. This was another Scottish tradition. The women in the bridal party created flowered swags to decorate the aisle and arches, of which I was told there were several, in the church.

Mara had to help oversee something in the kitchen, but I’d been determined to find out who had been in Angie’s stepmom’s room the night before. I’d positioned myself in the center of the room, and without my friends around, I was free to listen to the various gossip.

I was surprised when Damien’s mother sat next to me. “Doctor, are you okay?”

“I’m better, thanks.”

She picked up some of the heather and one of the shorter boughs that sat on the long wooden table.

“Thank, you,” she whispered. “For helping Caleb.” She sniffed. “I know

what you must think of us, but he's not a bad boy."

I wasn't so sure about that, but I wouldn't point it out.

"We'll need to get him to a hospital as soon as we can," I said.

She nodded. "He's never been one for handling pressure, and his father has put a great deal of it on him. This isn't the first time—I'm not sure what to do."

While she may have been a posh woman who didn't think my friend was good enough for her son, she was still a mother.

"Addiction is difficult and very hard on families."

"It runs in ours—at least my husband's side—although mostly it was drink. His father—well, let's just say, it's in the blood, blue as it may be."

Her tone was light, as though she'd been making fun of their lineage, which didn't make sense.

"There are several studies that show genetics are involved in addiction. But it's also about the choices we make."

She sighed. "I'm the first to admit my son—and my husband—have made poor choices. If he pushes Damien away, I shall never forgive him." She sounded like she meant it.

"So, you aren't against the marriage?"

She frowned. "Of course not. She's a wonderful young woman, and brilliant. I've done my homework on her. While I'm not a fan of her specific style or her garish wedding, she's a good match for my son. She far exceeds the women he dated at university."

The woman next to me went up in my estimation tenfold. I couldn't hold the style question against her. Angie's preferences were distinctive for her.

I had no idea why she confided in me, but I couldn't imagine what it must be like to have her jerk of a husband and a son addicted to drugs. I worked in emergency medicine, and I'd seen how drugs and alcohol destroyed families.

"At least the heather matches her theme," I said as she stuffed another set of flowers into boughs.

"Aye, it does. Do you know the significance? I like that she's included some of the more important traditions into her untraditional wedding."

"I don't know the significance."

“The heather is for luck and protection. The roses and lavender the others are adding symbolize love and the coming together of two families.”

“This is my first Scottish wedding, but I like that you have so many traditions and that Angie included them.”

She smiled. “I had my doubts, but she’s a young woman who knows what she wants, and she isn’t afraid to make it happen. I admire her.”

That was the last thing I’d expected her to say. Except for the time when I’d seen her having a nearly silent argument with her husband, she’d been quiet during most of the events.

Perhaps she wished she could be as bold as her soon-to-be daughter-in-law.

“May I ask you a question?”

“Yes, it’s the least I can do for you helping my son.”

“Why is your husband so opposed to Angie marrying Damien? I mean since you don’t seem to have a problem with it.”

“It isn’t Angie so much as her ancestors. There is a silly feud that goes back hundreds of years with her father’s family. Had to do with some property her family believes my husband’s ancestors stole.”

“I had no idea. Angie didn’t mention it.”

“She most likely thinks it is an absurd situation. I do. The truth is my husband’s ancestors probably did exactly what Angie’s family say they did. They were a notorious bunch.”

“What is it they say? Behind great wealth are a lot of not-so-nice people.”

She smiled. “I’ve never heard that, but I’m certain it’s true. At least in our crowd. Out-dated ideas about everything, and posh nonsense.”

“I can see why maybe Angie’s family wouldn’t be happy about the marriage, but why would that matter so much to your husband?”

“You’re American, so I’m sure family feuds seem archaic, but they can go on for centuries here.

“To be honest, I don’t think it’s the feud as much as that Angie gives my son Damien ideas to achieve his own dreams. My husband is counting on him to take over the family empire.

“My husband spends most of his time on the golf course and at his club,

so Damien has already taken over the reins as far as I can see.”

“Strange.”

“What do you mean?” she asked.

I shrugged. “I heard your husband threatened to disown Damien if he didn’t give up on Angie. I think it was Caleb who said he tried to blackmail his own son.”

She paused in her flower making. “What?” She turned to me. Her eyebrows drew together. “Caleb said that?”

“Yes. It was a direct threat. But I believe Damien called him on the bluff. Well, since he’s going forward with the wedding.”

“I’m going to kill him.” Her hands trembled, and then she seemed to realize what she said. “I don’t mean literally.”

“You didn’t know about the threat?”

“Not that he’d taken it that far. I can promise you it was an empty one. The only person he wants at the helm of the business is Damien. In the few years since my eldest has taken over, we’ve become quite competitive again in the market.

“If he doesn’t stop with his manipulations, he’s going to drive both our children away. I won’t have it.”

“Do you think your husband might have brought Robbie in?”

“Robbie?” She appeared genuinely confused.

“The dead man.”

“Oh. I’m sorry. I’ve met so many new people this week, I thought it might be someone in Angie’s family. You think my husband brought him here to cause trouble?”

I shrugged. “It’s possible.”

“A week ago, I’d have thought you mad. But his behavior since we’ve arrived has been abominable, and now you’re telling me he threatened Damien. A boy who has done nothing but work to please his father.

“So, yes. It is in the realm of possibility. Though, we haven’t seen Robbie in many years.”

That didn’t mean Mr. Carthage hadn’t met with him or hired him. Mr. Carthage had also skipped the stag that night.

“Was your husband in your room the night Robbie died?” I didn’t mean

for it to come out so bluntly.

“He was when I went to bed,” she said. “Once I take my tablets, though, I’m out. But he goes to sleep very early in the evenings. So I don’t see him murdering young Robbie.”

I could see it. Especially if Robbie planned to tell Damien and Angie the truth about the situation.

“May I ask you a question?”

“Yes,” I said.

“How do I save my son? He’s been in and out of rehab and jail so many times. I’m at my wits end, and his father has thrown up his hands. This last bit—he wouldn’t even go with me to see our Caleb. I’m not sure what to do.”

“I’m not an expert on the subject of addiction,” I said. “But getting him away from the environment he is in is important. He must want help. I also know he won’t be successful until he’s had a good dose of therapy.”

“I’ve been told the same by my psychiatrist,” she said.

I must have shown surprise.

She held up a hand. “I may appear a posh from Notting Hill, and I am. But I care about my children, and you don’t get through a marriage like mine without some mental health counseling along the way.”

I opened my mouth and closed it.

“Right, so why would I stay with him?” She shrugged. “He has his world, and I have mine. It works for me—except for the way he treats our children. Unfortunately, that too is something he inherited, which is probably why I’ve lived with it for so long. His father was an awful man. My husband is a kitten compared to him.

“That isn’t an excuse, but at least he didn’t beat the boys, like his father did. He’d berate them, send them to bed without supper, but he never laid a hand on them.”

Emotional abuse carried through families every bit as much as physical abuse did. Behaviors were learned, but that didn’t mean they couldn’t be changed. I didn’t think she was quite in the place for that lecture.

“Consorting with the enemy. What will Angie have to say about that?” The current stepmother sat down in a chair across from us. She sipped champagne and wore a scowl.

“I’m not the enemy, Dara. That’s what I just explained to the doctor.” Mrs. Carthage smiled, but it didn’t quite make it to her eyes.

“Right. You’re so happy about the wedding, you left my husband to pay for it all.”

“That isn’t true,” I said. “Angie and Damien paid for it themselves. They didn’t ask for help from anyone.”

The surprise on the stepmother’s face said it all. She’d had no idea. “But he said ... you must be wrong.” She was not a happy woman. “He told me we couldn’t—because he had to pay for the wedding.”

“Couldn’t what, dear?” Mrs. Carthage said.

“Never mind.” Dara gulped her champagne.

“When I fell against your door last night, I heard a man in your room. Is everything okay? I know Angie’s dad isn’t here yet,” I said.

There was a slight gasp from Damien’s mom, covered by a pretend cough.

“I have no idea what you’re talking about,” Dara said.

“When I fell against your door, you were arguing with a man. I heard it.”

Her eyes narrowed. “I’m not sure what you’re insinuating, Doctor, but I was the only one in there. You probably heard the telly.”

Then she stormed off.

“What was all that about?” Angie replaced her in the seat.

“A miscommunication, I think,” Mrs. Carthage said.

“Is everything, okay?” She glanced from me to her mother-in-law.

“Yes, dear. These are lovely flowers.” Then she lifted her head. “I want to formally apologize for my family,” she said. “I will not make excuses. They don’t deserve them. But I want you to know that I fully support your marriage to my son. He could not do better, in my estimation.”

Angie waved a hand in front of her face. “I’m trying not to cry,” she said. She moved around the table in front of us, to sit by Mrs. Carthage. “Thank you. I so needed to hear that.”

“Oh, my dear, I should have said something much sooner. This whole debacle should have never happened. Don’t listen to my husband—he has no idea what is best for his family. If he did, we wouldn’t be in this mess.”

Angie took a deep breath. “Will you tell Damien? He isn’t so sure your

husband isn't the one trying to kill me."

The woman gasped in surprise. "No. He would never." Her hand went to her chest. Then she looked at me and frowned.

"Oh my, how awful that my son could believe that." She sighed. "Though I suppose I understand why. I'll say this: he's many things, but not a murderer. I honestly don't think he has the nerve."

"Are you certain?" I asked. "Not to be rude, but he is the one who is most opposed to the marriage."

She swallowed hard. "My husband can be hateful and harsh with words. But he's a bit squeamish when it comes to blood and such. No. He might be manipulative, but murder?"

"He was in our room the night your friend Robbie died," she said to Angie. She snapped her fingers. "I did wake up to his snoring. We sleep in separate rooms at home. I didn't look at the clock, but he was there."

She was his wife, but I didn't see her as someone giving a false alibi for a man she didn't seem to love, no matter how much she might want to save face. She appeared to be fed up with her lot in life.

"That's good to know." Angie smiled. "Can I get you some tea or coffee?"

"We should be the ones waiting on you," Mrs. Carthage said. "Let me get you some tea."

"I'll come with you," Angie said.

They went off to the tea table. I shifted in my seat.

I didn't trust Angie's soon-to-be father-in-law, but that didn't mean he'd tried to kill me or my friends.

Was she right? It did take a certain breed to murder someone. It had been established that he wasn't the best of men.

I went back to the fact the first murder had been poison.

Women used poison.

And the stepmother had lied about a man being in her room last night.

She liked Angie, though. Where was the motive?

Still, I'd seen the look on her face when I asked about the night before. That woman was hiding something.

Maybe she was having an affair. Dangerous in a house full of family.

If I could find out who had been in her room, I might have my answer.
But I'd need a little help from my friends.

Chapter Fifteen

While everyone was at the rehearsal for the wedding, I planned to do a bit of snooping. It was impossible to rehearse in the Gothic church up the hill because of the snow. The staff had worked quickly to set up aisles and an arbor in the main ballroom.

Since it was just the wedding party and family so they could figure out where everyone would be sitting, it was the perfect time to do a bit of nosing about.

Mara had pilfered one of the master keys again.

“Where do you want to begin?” she asked.

“Do you have the list of rooms?”

She handed me a piece of paper.

“Let’s check the bridesmaid and cousin first,” I said. Those rooms were at the far end of the castle. “Then we can work our way forward.”

“It might go faster if we split up,” she said.

“No,” I said abruptly. “Sorry—I didn’t mean to be so sharp. I think it’s best if we stick together until we find the killer.”

She nodded.

I showed her the list I’d made. Tiffany, Marianne, Caleb, and Mr. Carthage were still on there. I’d added all the stepmothers. While I didn’t think they would hurt a hair on Angie and Damien’s heads, I could see them killing Robbie to make him go away.

If these crimes were separate, we had to keep an open mind.

“No one is off the list,” I said. “Every time I turn around, there is a new reason to suspect the steps. They had direct ties to the victim. They may not have killed him, but they could have been complicit in getting him to the

castle.

“I’m not expecting to find a sign that says, ‘I am the murderer.’”

“It would be helpful,” Mara joked.

“We need to know who brought him here. Then perhaps we can retrace his steps. If he planned to stay, there must be clothes somewhere.”

“Ewan’s men have searched everywhere, though.”

“Yes, but they weren’t thinking about finding a man’s belongings in a single woman’s room,” I said. “I’m looking for Robbie somewhere in this castle.”

That idea had hit me after my afternoon nap. The swelling was down in my knee, though I still used the cane for balance.

Since Marianne was Robbie’s cousin, we decided to search her area first. I’m not one to judge, but her room was a mess. Clothes littered the floor, bed, and every other available surface. It was as if she’d opened her suitcase and thrown the clothes in different directions.

The disarray made it difficult to sort through and see if there were male clothes somewhere. I didn’t find any.

I did find a journal. I held the tan leather book in my hands for a few seconds.

Reading someone’s innermost thoughts wasn’t something I’d ever think about doing, but we were trapped in a castle with a killer.

I thumbed through the book, which was half full. I focused on the last few pages.

Oh, Robbie, what happened? I have so many questions. Why were you here? What in the world were you thinking? And who killed you?

I had the same questions. The journal could have been a plant, but I didn’t think so. The rest of the pages were much of the same. A few times she recalled happy memories with her cousin. It was obvious that being at the wedding was the last thing she wanted, as she needed time to grieve.

I felt sorry for her. Perhaps her mental chaos had transferred to her environment. It wouldn’t have been the first time that happened to someone grieving.

Time to move on.

At least I could mark her off the list. It was more than evident she was in

mourning.

When I opened the door, Mara jumped a little. Then she laughed.

“This is nerve-racking,” she whispered. “Every noise makes me nervous.”

I told her what I’d found.

“Oh, that is sad. It must be difficult being stuck here. I mean, she’s a bridesmaid, but her cousin died. I think Angie would understand if she wanted to leave.”

“I’m certain she would. Okay, on to Tiffany’s room.”

The bridesmaid’s room was the opposite of Marianne’s: Tiffany’s clothes hung tidily in the wardrobe. Her toiletries were in neat rows on the bathroom counter. The meds were an interesting mix of antidepressants and made me wonder if she might be seeing more than one doctor. They weren’t medicines I would have prescribed together.

That might explain her erratic behavior and the strange looks she gave the bride.

When one’s body chemistry was out of control, mentally the mind could play tricks. I didn’t find anything that indicated Robbie might be staying in her room, but the killer was clever. I checked all the cupboards, but everything there belonged to Tiffany.

There wasn’t a single sign of Robbie in there.

I had several more rooms to search quickly.

“Did you find anything?” Mara asked again.

“Not really, but she’s still on the list.”

“Oh?”

“Yes. Let’s keep an eye on her.”

“We don’t have much time,” she said. “Where do you want to go next?”

“Let’s check Dara’s room.”

“Dara?”

“The current stepmom. That’s what I was telling you about. There was a man in her room, and her husband isn’t here.”

“Ohh—right. She could be having an affair with someone here,” Mara said.

“Or her cohort in crime. I would have said Caleb. Ick. But he was in our

room, right?”

“Yes. Nevertheless, he’s still on the list as well. I believe him about the drugs, but not anything else.”

We went through the front hall of the castle and then over to the west wing. The room was on the first floor, a bit too close to the room where the bridal party was still at the rehearsal.

“Housekeeping,” I said as I knocked on the door.

“You’re brilliant, but what if she’d answered? She wouldn’t have believed you were helping the household staff.”

“I would have shoved you inside and told you to ask if she needed more towels.”

She laughed. “Don’t take too long. I’m getting more nervous as we go along.”

“I won’t.”

I made quick work of the bathroom. The room was neat, and not a sign any male had been in there. The only item out of place was a bottle of gin, in which three-fourths of it was missing.

Drinking was one of the Scots’ favorite past times, but she’d only been here a few days.

“I’ve been helping to make sure everyone had enough towels,” Mara said loudly.

Crud. That couldn’t be good. The doorknob turned, and I dove under the bed, whacking my knees in the process. I covered my mouth with my hands to keep the scream to myself.

Lucky for me, the beds were set so high, I fit fine underneath.

“Bloody wedding. It never stops,” Dara said hatefully. “I’ve got to get out of this mess.”

Odd attitude. From what I’d seen, she cared for Angie a great deal, although the events had been rather nonstop.

I prayed she didn’t glance under the bed and that she wasn’t here to stay.

She sat down on the edge of the bed and slipped off her puce heels. They dropped to the floor. Then she lay back on the mattress. Great. The last thing I needed was for her to take a nap. It was still in the early evening.

“Someone we knew died. You’d think that would be enough.” Her tone

was more of surprise than anything.

Wait. She'd said, "we."

I tried to think back to how long she'd been married to Angie's dad. Would she have known Robbie? My mind whirled through the many conversations over the last few days.

Someone knocked on the door. What if it was the gentleman from the other night?

"What now?" she grumbled. "Who is it?" she asked with faked sweetness.

"Me," Angie said through the door. "I need your help with something."

The woman sighed. Then she put her heels back on.

"What is it, luv?"

"I was wondering if you could help me with the final seating arrangements for the wedding dinner," Angie said. "Mum and I are disagreeing again. You know how you are the voice of reason."

"Do you want to do it in here?"

"Uh. The plans are in the ballroom. I thought it would be easier for us to see how things would be set up."

"Let me grab my key."

A few seconds later, they were gone. I waited half a beat and then scooted out from under the bed.

The door opened, and my heart flew into my throat.

"I nearly had a heart attack," Mara said. "Come on. I'm not sure how long Angie can stall her."

"Smart thinking," I said.

"Angie is now curious why you suspect her. You'll need to explain." She peeked out into the hallway. "It's clear."

"That was a close call."

"Where did you hide?"

"Under the bed."

She laughed, and I joined her.

"Did you find anything?"

"No. But I didn't get to finish. There were tons of clothes in the armoire. She did say something that made me wonder about her." I told her what I'd

heard.

“The last few days have been intense,” Mara said. “I think most of us could use a break.” She stopped. “Do not ever tell Angie I said that.”

I hooked my arm in hers. “I get it. I wouldn’t be surprised if Angie feels the same way. She had no idea the weather would trap us all here.”

“We’ll be fine—as long as it doesn’t turn into a *Lord of the Flies* situation.”

We laughed.

“I meant to ask earlier, any news about the weather?” I asked.

“The snow is supposed to stop in the early morning. Ewan promised Angie that the plows would be out first thing so everyone can get here.”

“I can’t believe the big day is finally here.”

“Me either. And we are all still alive.”

“There is that.”

“Are there any other rooms to search?”

“I’d honestly like to search them all, but I nearly went into cardiac arrest with the last room.”

“Thank goodness you said that. I’m not sure my heart can take much more,” she said. “When she walked into that room, I nearly died from fear.”

“Me too. Thank you for thinking so quickly. But we are no closer to finding our killer. If the roads really do clear tomorrow, everyone will be leaving. While it will be a relief, we lose our killer.”

“Have you talked to Ewan lately? He and his men questioned several people after your gargoyle incident. He may have some ideas to narrow down our search.”

We entered our room.

“I’m not sure I want to tell him I’ve been snooping through rooms. Besides, do you want to be the one to tell him that we went behind his team to make sure they didn’t miss anything?”

“What is it you American’s say? ‘*Hard pass.*’”

I smiled.

“He’ll wonder why I’d risk being caught and be angry that we went behind his back. Again. He was furious about Caleb, though we’d likely saved his life. He was very dehydrated.”

“That’s true.”

“Where are Robbie’s things? We are out in the middle of nowhere. He had to have at least a change of clothes. And where are those bottles of antifreeze he was carrying?”

“Maybe he put them back after arguing with the dark-haired lady Tommy saw him with,” Mara said.

“But the clothes. That’s going to drive me crazy.”

“You always tell me science tells the story. Maybe go back to that.”

We sat down in front of the fire. I’m not sure who kept all the fireplaces going in this place, but it was a small miracle they always had enough wood to keep them burning through the storm.

I opened the notebook I kept with me.

“The facts tell us he was a former drug addict. He died from antifreeze poisoning. Everyone had access to the garages where antifreeze is kept.”

“Yes, but the maintenance men said none of the antifreeze was missing,” Mara pointed out. “Ewan says they keep impeccable records.”

“That would indicate the poisoning was premeditated. The killer planned all of this. What they didn’t count on was being stuck here. They probably assumed once someone died, whether that was you, Angie, or Robbie, the wedding would be called off and everyone would go home.”

“Best laid plans, and all that.” Mara leaned her elbows on the table. “What we need to do is check with Ewan to see where everyone was when Robbie was killed, and when the gargoyle came after you. Is it odd he hasn’t shared that yet?”

I shrugged. “He may be as puzzled as we are. Since the killer—or killers—had their plans changed at the last minute with the storm, mistakes had to be made, though. I still think Robbie’s may have been an accident. The person who had been with him in that tower may have not been there to kill him.

“Ugh. We are missing something. I feel like something is niggling in the back of my mind, but I can’t quite figure it out.”

She tapped the table with her fingernail. “You’re good at this sort of thing. It will come to you. Unfortunately, most of the wedding party and Angie’s family knew Robbie. As did most of Damien’s family. He and

Robbie were friends long before he met Angie.”

“Do you think Damien is capable of killing? I’ve asked that before. He doesn’t seem the type, but he does love Angie. The only thing is, maybe a crime a passion would fit him. But this was planned. I keep saying that. It’s true, though. The killer brought the antifreeze with them.”

The niggling in my brain stopped. The murder scene.

“I need to check the tower again,” I said. “The one where Robbie died. Henry collected evidence for us, but I never went back up there.”

“Can’t that wait until morning? You said it’s super creepy, and you need to be careful with your knee.”

“You don’t have to come with me,” I said. “You’ve been brave enough all night.”

“Well, if you’re going, I am. Ewan told me to stick to you like glue.”

I laughed.

“It’s like he doesn’t trust me.”

Mara snorted. “Are you sure we need to do this right now?”

“I promise it is important.”

She sighed. “Okay.”

A few minutes later, we were at the tower door.

“It’s not working,” Mara said as she tried the master key.

The lights flickered and went out.

“Can we go back to our room now?” Mara asked.

“I’m sure the lights will come back on in a minute. Try the other key on the ring.”

I shone my flashlight on the keyhole. Poor Mara’s hands shook so hard, she couldn’t fit it in the lock.

“What are you doing,” a man said in the shadows.

Three things happened at once. We screamed, Mara tried to jump into my arms, and we tumbled to the floor.

Chapter Sixteen

“Bloody hell. What is wrong with you two?” Ewan said gruffly as he helped us off the floor. He smelled of pine and warmth. The lights flickered on just in time for us to see his scowl.

But he’d scared the heck out of us.

“Why are you going around scaring women in hallways?” I asked as I brushed myself off.

“Ewan, you have ninja skills,” Mara said. “We didn’t hear you coming.”

“Obviously,” he said. “I’ll ask again, why are you trying to go in a tower I specifically told you to stay out of?”

Mara and I glanced at each other.

“Forensics,” I said quickly. “I need to see the first crime scene.”

“There’s nothing to see. The only evidence up there was Robbie and the sick. You have the body, and we brought you samples of the other. We’ve cleaned everything up.”

“I understand that, but I need to see the space.”

“It’s dark. There’s nothing to see.”

I closed my eyes, and what I’d been searching for in my mind, came to me clearly. “Ewan, I need you to let Mara and I up there for a few minutes. Then I want you to go down to the garden and look up at the tower. It’s important.”

“Why can’t Mara go to the garden? It isn’t safe up there. I need to be with you.”

I shook my head. “I promise we’ll be careful. Please. This could lead us to Robbie’s killer.”

“Do you have the walkie I gave you?”

“It’s in my bag in my room.”

“Of course it is,” he said. He pulled two walkie-talkies out of his big jacket, which was covered in snowflakes.

“Have you been outside?”

“Aye.” He didn’t offer an explanation. “How long will this take? I need to get back to my men.”

“Not long,” I said.

He handed me one of the walkie-talkies.

“Thanks. I need you to go to the back of the garden to that bench by the roses. It’s near where the pen is.”

After glancing at me like I was headed to a padded room, he unlocked the door to the tower. “I’m going to lock you in. I don’t want anyone trying to come up after you.”

Mara shivered. “Good idea.”

Once we were inside the tower, the door shut ominously.

The lock clicked into place.

We climbed slowly up the steps, sideways as Ewan and I had done that night.

“I can’t believe I let you talk me into this,” she whispered.

I smiled. “Have I mentioned how grateful I am for you?”

“Don’t try to sweet-talk me. This place is creepy.”

“At least the cobwebs have been cleared out.”

“Why did you tell me that?”

“I’m trying to recall everything I saw that night.”

We finally made it upstairs. We used our flashlights to shine down on the floor.

“That’s it. I thought I remembered it that way.”

“What are you talking about?”

“I’ll explain to you in a minute,” I said.

I pushed the button on the walkie-talkie, and it made a terrible sound.

“Uh, Ewan. Are you there?”

“In position,” he said, as if we were in the middle of some covert opp.

“I’m going to recreate the scene. Whatever you see, burn the details into your brain.” I heard him snort in disbelief. “Mara, stand behind me.”

“This is getting weird.”

I laughed. “Do this and we can leave.”

“You owe me one,” she said. “I don’t know what, but something.”

“Whatever you want.”

“The dentist would be nice.”

“I thought you were off men for a while.”

“I am. Doesn’t mean I couldn’t use a good shag now and again.”

This time I was the one who snorted.

“Okay, stand behind me. When I slide down, I want you to stay there, okay?”

“Yes. We’ve definitely headed straight into weird.”

“It will make sense.”

The walkie squawked, and I dropped it.

“Did you do it yet?” Ewan barked.

I cleared my throat. “It’s happening now. Keep an eye on the window.”

Mara stood behind me. “Turn the flashlight toward the window,” I told her.

She did what I asked. I leaned onto the window, and then slid down to the floor.

“Could you see Mara before I slid down?” I asked.

“Nay,” he said. “Are you ready for me to come get you?”

“Yes.”

We made the arduous trip down the stairs. By the time we made it, the door was open. Ewan stood there holding it.

“Robbie is about five feet ten,” I said.

He nodded.

“The floor up there is flat. So, the person behind him was either his height or shorter. We’re looking for someone five ten or shorter,” I said.

“Mara is just a bit shorter than me. If it were someone taller, I would have seen them towering over the other person.

“But that’s not what I saw.”

“How does that narrow down the suspects?” Mara asked. “Most of the women here, with the exception of Marianne, are about our height.

“Aye,” Ewan said. “But none of the men. Except for Angie’s Uncle

Clyde. There's no way he would have made it up those stairs with his gout."

"Exactly," I said. "Most of the men are taller by a few inches."

"So, we are definitely looking for a woman?" Mara asked.

"Very likely. The one thing I didn't account for, though, was he could have bent down a bit. Maybe he'd been trying to help, if it was a man. But no matter what, the person couldn't have been taller than Robbie before he slid down that window. I'm not saying it's perfect science, but it's something we can work with at least."

"You have a point."

"I'm glad you agree. The other thing is, we need to check the cars that are here. Every single one of them."

"My men did that yesterday," he said. "Most of the family and friends used private car services because of the weather. We only have enough garages to store a few at a time."

"How many is a few?"

"Space for about thirty cars, and then there is a lot on the other side of one of the carriage houses for the valets to use."

"Nothing against your people, but did they do a thorough search of the trunks?"

He gave me a stare. I gave it right back at him. "You've searched every room in the castle." I failed to mention Mara and I had done a bit of that as well. "You didn't find the mallet, the poison, or his clothes."

"Right," he said.

"So it follows that there is a chance the items are out of the castle. Since no one can leave, then they must either be in one of the carriage houses, the garage, or an outbuilding that isn't far from the house."

"Aye, I'm the constable. We've searched everywhere."

The man was stubborn as they came, but I was even more so.

"The valets must keep all the keys somewhere. And we could at the very least check the ones in the garage again. Between last time your team searched and now, they could have been moved."

Mara grimaced. "It's freezing outside, and the path to the garage is covered. It isn't safe in a blizzard like this."

"Right. But more cars will arrive tomorrow. If we can at least rule out

the ones in the garage, we'll have a start. If I don't at least try to find some clues, I won't be able to sleep."

She sighed.

"I'll give you a half hour—that's it," Ewan said. "We'll be working through the night to make a safe passage of the roads. I don't have time to test your theories."

"You don't have to. Go and do whatever you must. Just show us where the keys for the cars in the garage are."

"I'll be coming with you. Get your coats."

Mara and I rushed back to our room. By rush, I mean I hobbled quickly. My knee and calf ached, but I wasn't about to turn down an offer of help.

I borrowed a pair of earmuffs from Mara.

I pulled a flashlight pen out of my go bag and stuffed it in the pocket of my marshmallow coat, along with three pairs of medical gloves and some evidence bags.

"Ready."

"Aye," she said reluctantly.

My hand was on the doorknob when a large boom shook the door.

Chapter Seventeen

Mara and I jumped back. She grabbed the fire poker and handed me the shovel from the andirons. All this murder and snooping had us on edge. But we were two women ready to tackle anything.

“Ready,” I mouthed.

She shook her head but brandished the poker.

I opened the door quickly, and a man stumbled into our room.

“Bloody hell, what happened?” Henry said as he rolled over onto the floor.

The shock when he noticed our weapons almost made me laugh.

Almost.

“I’m going to kill you,” Mara said. She pointed the poker at him. “You and Ewan need to learn to announce yourselves. You scared us to death. Don’t go bangin’ on women’s doors. It isn’t right.”

“I was out of breath. Ran here. Ma’am, you’re needed in Caleb’s room. I believe he’s taken a turn, and not in a good way,” Henry said quickly.

Well, that changed our plans.

“Let me—”

“I’ve got your kit,” Mara said as she tossed her weapon back in the andirons. I handed her my shovel.

“Your cane,” Henry said as he thrust it at me. “You need to watch those legs.”

They were sore, and we had many stairs to climb.

“What do you mean by ‘worse’?” I asked as we left my room.

“We’ve had one of the housekeepers keeping watch over him in the room. I’ve been stationed outside. He’s lost consciousness. She was worried

because his fever is higher as well.”

That wasn't good. There might have been more going on than just withdrawal, though none of these symptoms were out of the ordinary.

“Let Ewan know we've been detained. He's waiting on us,” I said as we climbed the never-ending stairs. There had to be an elevator around here somewhere, but I had yet to find it.

When we arrived in the room, I was out of breath.

The smell of vanilla hit hard, and candles lit around the room were, I'm sure, meant to help with the scent of sick. It was much better now than this morning.

They had been right to come and get me.

He was gray. Using my flashlight pen, I checked his eyes. His pupils were dilated, but not as bad as earlier. His temperature was quite high, but that could have been the drugs burning through his body.

This reaction is what kept addicts going back for more. Recovery was no joke for opioids.

It was the rash on his neck and chest that bothered me most. The raised bumps were a systemic reaction.

No way was it caused by what I gave him in the IV earlier in the day. None of those drugs would have caused a rash like this.

“Caleb, can you hear me? It's Doctor Emilia.”

I didn't expect him to answer, but it was worth a try.

“Henry, I need you to find Caleb's mother. Now.”

He left.

“Has anyone else been in the room?” I asked the housekeeper.

She was younger, and I hadn't seen her around.

“I've only been watching him a couple of hours,” she said. Squeezing her hands together she shifted from foot to foot.

Guilty of something.

“Did he ask you for anything?”

“No, miss. Some water when I first came in. That's it. I tried to get him to eat the broth that was sent from the kitchen, but he wasn't having it. I only got a few drops in him.”

“Broth? Mara?”

“On it.”

“Who brought the broth up?” Mara asked.

I turned back to Caleb.

“There were some women who came by. A group of them. Said they were family. One of them carried the broth, said she’d come from the kitchen.”

The girl was uselessly vague with information, and I didn’t have time to play twenty questions with her.

“How long ago did you notice he was sick?” I asked. “And someone turn on all the lights. I need more light.”

His pulse was low, as was his blood pressure.

Again, his body had to work hard to push out the drugs, but there was no denying his heart was failing when I listened to it. That was one of the biggest dangers, but none of that explained the systemic rash.

“Did anyone else visit him?” Mara asked the young woman. Henry had given her the walkie-talkie. “Ewan, we need Abigail,” Mara said. “Em’s face is scary.”

“Got it,” Ewan said.

“The women with the broth. His brother came by but only checked in on him, as the patient was sleeping. He didn’t go near him, just asked me questions.

“And his mum was here. There was another woman as well. Oh, my. I can’t remember who she was. Someone who was a friend. Petite and brunette,” she said.

That only described half of the woman at the castle.

“Oh, and there was a tall blond woman here when I came in for my shift.”

Was that Marianne? Why would Robbie’s cousin visit Caleb?”

That one didn’t make sense.

“You made a point of saying his brother didn’t go near him,” Mara said. “Did anyone get near him?”

“I’m not sure what you mean?”

Caleb’s breathing grew shallow.

“The broth. How long ago was he given the broth?”

“An hour or so.”

“Where are the dishes?”

“That woman I told you about, she took them down to the kitchen for me. She was worried about him.”

“That’s the one with the dark hair?” I asked. “The same one who brought the broth in?”

“Aye. He was a bit out of his mind, ya know. Kept talking gibberish. Uh, she’s actually the one who got him to eat a bit. She said I could say it was me, so I didn’t get in trouble.”

“Arrgh,” I grunted. It wasn’t like me to get frustrated.

“Deep breath,” Mara said. “They are housekeepers, not nurses.”

I closed my eyes. She was right.

“Can you get me a bucket of water and some more towels,” I said to the housekeeper. “As well as some ice or snow. A bucket of it, if you please. Go see if you can find that bowl that was used. Do not touch it.”

“I don’t understand, Doctor.”

“The doctor thinks the patient might have been poisoned by the broth. Do what she asks, and hurry.”

I opened Caleb’s jaw and sniffed. That sweet smell of antifreeze was evident.

“What do you think happened?” Mara asked when the woman left the room.

“I need Abigail,” I said. “We’re going to have to flush his system quickly, but I’ll need labs before we do that.”

“Tell me what I can do until she gets here.”

I set up new IV bags. I had to back off the meds I’d given him for withdrawal for the others to clean out his system. Seconds mattered. If his heart failed, there would be no bringing him back.

Someone had poisoned him.

Finding a vein wasn’t easy. He was still dehydrated by his drug use.

“Bring the kit over here,” I barked. “Sorry.”

“Don’t be,” Mara said.

“I need five vials. Those right there.” I pointed to the top of the kit. “Hand me a new one each time I ask.”

By the time I'd filled four vials, the vein had collapsed.

With the scent in his mouth, the broth was most likely the way in, but I checked his body for any place he might have been pricked with a needle.

I didn't find anything except that the rash had spread down his back. I put cortisone cream on all the redness. But it was his insides I was worried about. No telling what kind of organ damage could have been done.

He didn't have the blue tinge to his eyes like Robbie, but I couldn't be certain it was antifreeze until we tested it. After checking everyone who had asked, we had very few of the diabetes strips left.

The door burst open, and Caleb's mother rushed into the room.

"What happened to my boy?"

"I can't be sure until we run some tests. He wasn't quite with it when we were doing a medical history this morning. Does he have any known allergies?"

"No," she said. She stood at the end of the bed. "Is he going to die? What can I do?"

I blew out a breath. "Are you sure about the allergies? He's developed a rash, and it wasn't caused by the drugs I gave him this morning. It could be food or medical allergies that cause a rash like this."

Abigail came in, and in true Abigail fashion, she gathered up the test tubes I had lying on the bed.

"He is unresponsive and has developed a systemic reaction. I need quick tests."

She nodded. "Poison. Is it the same?"

"Smells like it, but I have to make certain. His heart is failing—we must get this right."

His mother gasped.

"Mara?" I was a bit gentler this time.

"Mrs. Carthage let's get out of the doctor's way. If anyone can save him, it's Em, I promise. She's the best. Did you know she was head of an ER in Seattle? She's like one of those women on that *Grey's Anatomy* show."

I was nothing like those women. I did my best to save my patients rather than having sex in broom closets.

Focus.

“I can’t give him anything to counteract what’s happened until we know exactly what we’re dealing with this time.”

“This time?”

“Yes, he has a mix of drugs in his body.” I should have checked the kit after he was in my room. “He may have also taken more drugs than he told us about.”

“Tox screens, as many as you can run with what we have. I know that’s not much.”

“Wait,” Abigail said. “Smell this.”

She handed me one of the towels we’d used to help cool his body.

“That sickly sweet. It’s coming from his pores.”

“The housekeeper said he only ate a small amount of the broth, which is what I think was used to transfer the poison. But we were already flushing his system.”

“Poison.” His mother cried out. “Oh, my boy. No. You must save him.”

I ignored her.

“Ethylene glycol first.”

“Yes,” Abigail said. She dropped everything in her arms on the bed and searched through my kit.

By the time we went through every test we could, we’d narrowed it down. His not wanting to eat had probably saved his life.

It took several hours, but his fever went down. His body couldn’t handle much more, and while we could run some tests, he desperately needed a hospital. There was no telling how the poison, in conjunction with his withdrawal, had damaged his body.

I sent Abigail back to rest, but I had a feeling it wouldn’t be for long.

Caleb’s mother paced back and forth in front of the fireplace.

“Who would try to kill him? Do you think it’s my husband? I—I can’t believe he would stoop to something like this.”

“Why don’t you tell me what you can about Robbie? I understand he was friends with Caleb and Damien.”

“For many years,” she said. “He was a sweet child. His father was our barrister for a long time, but he had a heart attack and died when Robbie was quite young. His life was never quite the same after that. His mother—she did

not handle her husband's death well. She remarried quickly. Robbie was often left to his own devices, even at a very young age."

"How old was he then?"

"Ten or so. He's a year younger than Damien and a year older than Caleb. My husband paid for Robbie's schooling. Well, not university. He didn't want to go. By then he had a band."

"You paid for his schooling?"

"Mind you, my husband felt responsible for the boy, as he'd been arguing with Robert, Robbie's father, when he died."

I frowned.

"I know what you must be thinking, but they were on the phone. He collapsed at his home. Though, when he was older, I believe Robbie blamed my husband."

Was that why he was here? For revenge against the family and his ex-girlfriend? It would make sense. But he had to have had help.

Someone had poisoned Caleb.

"Do you know if Robbie ever worked for a pharmacist, or a chemist, as you call them here?"

"Not likely," she said. "His trouble with drugs began early in life. Damien tried to help him through the years, was even in the band with him for a short time. His father had a few words about that."

"While I felt sorry for the young man, his problems with drugs and the law—I didn't want that sort of life for my children. Now, look what my snobbery has wrought. My family is no better. If I'd been there for Robbie, maybe his life could have been different."

"We can't control them," I said. "Your son and Robbie are adults now. They are, and were, responsible for their life choices."

She appeared extremely distraught as she glanced at her son. "I should have done better. His father—they've never been able to get along. Every meal, every time they were in the same room, arguments erupted. That wasn't easy on my Caleb." She sniffed. "If he dies, I'll never forgive myself."

"Not your fault, Mum." A hoarse whisper came from the bed.

We rushed over. She took his hand. I busied myself checking his vitals. His blood pressure was low, but that was to be expected.

“Caleb, luv. I’m so sorry. I should have done more to help you.”

“Did it to myself, Mum. Am I dying?” He glanced over at me.

“I—we’re doing our best.” I learned long ago not to make claims about keeping someone alive. I had no idea how his body might be reacting to the trauma, and I wouldn’t lie to him.

“Confess,” he said. The words were barely a whisper. I almost thought I’d made them up.

Chapter Eighteen

Caleb's mother squeezed his hand and then kissed his fingers. "It's enough that you're awake. I thought we lost you. Whatever you need to say can wait."

"No," he said hoarsely. "I messed up. I—have to tell the truth."

"Caleb, I'll not allow you to legally cause yourself harm. Wait until you're better, and we can decide what to do."

He turned his head to me. "I was with Robbie when he died," he said.

I stopped checking his pulse.

"Caleb, don't," his mother said. "Luv, please."

"No, Mum. They need to know. If I don't make it through the night, I ..."

"We have doctor-patient confidentiality," I said. "But if you tell me something that might help with the case, as a coroner I will have to share the information with the constable. Do you understand?"

"I just bloody want it over," he said.

"I need to get his father. He can't—"

"No," Caleb whispered. "Not him."

"Just tell me what you know, and then we can decide what to do with the information."

"I saw him in the hallway when I came out of my room the night I arrived," he said. "I thought maybe I imagined him, as I was coming down off the gear. I wanted to head down to the stag, but I decided to follow him. I barely made it up those stairs. I could barely breathe."

He coughed, and then we thought he might be sick. I held up the bucket, but he shook his head.

“He was just standing there, staring out the windows, even though you couldn’t see much because it was so dark. I turned on my flashlight and nearly fell down the stairs when he turned to face me. It was Robbie, but ...”

“His features had changed,” I said.

“Aye.” His eyes closed, and for a few minutes he didn’t say anything. “He looked rough.”

“You need to rest,” I said. As much as I needed this information, I wouldn’t put his life in danger.

“I have to finish.” He tried to breathe deeply but coughed. That wasn’t a good sign. I used my stethoscope to listen to his lungs. The telltale sound of pneumonia wasn’t there. At least he had that going for him.

“I asked if he had any gear on him, and he acted like I was crazy. Said he’d been clean for years. But I swear he was on something. He was ranting about lies and needing to protect people.

“When I asked why he was there, he said he’d done something bad, but he had to fix it. Right after that, he stumbled against the window. Thought he might fall through. I tried to grab him, but he pulled away from me. Then he wretched. Told me to go away.”

He closed his eyes again. “I didn’t know he was dying, but I might as well have killed him. It’s no excuse, but my brain was in a fog. I half thought I imagined it when I woke up the next day.”

His mother sat next to him on the bed. “Darling boy, it wasn’t your fault.”

“Any decent bloke would have gotten him help. He didn’t have to die.”

“I’m not sure it would have done any good,” I said. It wasn’t to make him feel better; it was the truth. “The amount of poison he’d ingested by that time had done irreversible damage. Did he mention if anyone else was involved? How he arrived?”

“Enough,” his mother said. “I’m grateful for your help, Doctor. But as you said he needs to rest. He’s said enough.”

“Nay,” he said. “I don’t remember his exact words, just that he wanted to set it right. Then he bent over and was sick. Told me to leave, and I’m not good with that sort of thing—even if it’s my own—so I left.” His last few words were a bit slurred.

His eyes fluttered shut.

“Is he ...?” She sobbed.

I checked his pupils.

“He’s sleeping,” I said. “That took a great deal of effort.”

“What will you do?”

“I’m not sure what you mean?”

“With the information. He let Robbie die.”

Or he killed him. Even though Caleb was ill, I wasn’t sure I believed his death-bed confession. It would make sense if he and Robbie worked together to destroy the wedding. They were both drug users, and as Abigail pointed out, “Dr. Google” can help anyone find easy poisons to use.

I’d been thinking one of the suspects might be a chemist or in the medical profession. The doses needed to make someone sick, instead of killing them, would have been specific. But that didn’t mean a layperson couldn’t figure it out.

One thing was for certain: Robbie hadn’t poisoned himself, and Caleb had been in his vicinity.

There was a knock on the door, and Ewan entered.

“How is he?”

“We’re doing our best, but he needs a hospital,” I said.

“We’ve four more hours of this blasted weather, and then we’ll get a helicopter in as soon as possible.”

“Thank you, Constable. Please know how grateful I am to you and the doctor,” Mrs. Carthage said. She gave me a look, as if willing me to hold back the truth.

“Aye, we’re lucky that Em was here.” He very seldom used my name.

“I need to speak to you—outside.”

I followed him out.

“What’s the real prognosis?”

“I honestly can’t say. Abigail is running some tests so I can check his liver enzymes and kidney functions, but it’s nearly impossible to truly know without the proper equipment. Everything is slapdash, but we’re doing our best.”

“I’ve no doubt,” he said. “Did he say anything?”

“What do you mean?” I took my oath seriously.

“Henry compared Caleb’s fingerprints with some we found where the victim died. If he lives long enough, I’ll be charging him with murder.”

“Is he the one who pushed the gargoyle?”

“Boot print doesn’t fit anything we found in his room, but that doesn’t mean it wasn’t him.”

“I see. Well, he’s quite ill, and I’m not certain if he’s going to make it through the night. And then there’s the fact that someone tried to poison him.”

“What?” He seemed genuinely surprised.

“I thought someone might have told you.”

“I’ve been using the radio to communicate with the station. We’re finally through. I had them do a background check on Caleb. He’s mixed up with some rather nasty fellows in Edinburgh, who deal in drugs and gambling.”

“But that doesn’t make him a murderer.”

“Aye, but he’d also been trying to get money from his dad and brother. Could be he wanted payback because they refused to help him.”

I hadn’t heard about that.

I pursed my lips. “Right. Again, I might understand if he went after one of them. But Robbie? Angie? Why?”

“Take away the one person Damien loves most? People have been murdered for less,” he said.

“Well, he won’t be going to prison in the near future. His recovery from ethylene glycol mixed with the drugs he already had in his system will take a while.”

“He was poisoned?”

“Yes, that’s what I was trying to say. Someone who visited him earlier tried to kill him.”

“Do you know who came into the room?”

“The housekeeper you assigned knew a few of the people, but not all. You may want to have your men show her the guest list. A petite, dark-haired woman brought him broth and then took the dishes away to the kitchen. Your young housekeeper hasn’t come back with the bowl, so I’m guessing it was washed.

“She may be a little afraid of me. I tend to growl when I’m working.”

He chuckled. “She bloody well deserves a scolding. That’s Samantha, one of my men’s daughters. She’s trying to earn a bit before university next year and offered to help this weekend. I’ll let him know.”

“Just talk to her, Ewan, like a human being. Mara was grilling her for me while I worked on Caleb, but I was distracted. She saw the person who poisoned Caleb. She needs protection.”

“Aye. Good point. I’ll have her dad question her.”

“Show her the list of women guests. Maybe she’ll recognize one of them. The suspect arrived with a group of women, but she left alone after feeding Caleb. She’s one of our killers.”

“Aye. You’re on to something there, Doc.”

“I do remember that—what was her name?”

“Samantha.”

“I’m tired, but she said that the woman told her to say she fed the broth to Caleb.”

“I’m not following.” He crossed his arms.

“The suspect fed the poison—at least I think it was in the broth—to Caleb. But she told—Samantha to say that she fed him. Which would make Samantha the attempted murderer.”

“Blasted witch.” He stopped. “Sorry, Doc.”

“Don’t be. I agree with you. The girl was vulnerable, and whoever is doing this is a conniving—well, you said it best—witch. Smart, manipulative, and dangerous.”

“Aye. We’ll get on those photos right away.”

I yawned.

“When was the last time you slept?” he asked.

“I could ask you the same.”

He shrugged. “I don’t need much. Is the patient stable enough I can post someone here to give you a break?”

I very much needed a bed and to get off my legs, which were killing me. I could have slept on the sofa in the patient’s room, but I wouldn’t have rested.

“Let me check on him one more time. Whoever you post must let me

know if there is any change in his condition. Immediately.”

“Henry and a couple of my other men have some medical training. They’ll keep an eye on him.” He took off down the hall. That’s when I realized no one was here, outside the door.

Strange.

Except for his mother, Caleb wasn’t allowed any other visitors. It was more for his safety than anything else.

I went into the room to talk with his mother.

“If he breathes or coughs funny—anything different than him sleeping—let me know immediately.”

“I will. Did you tell the constable what Caleb said?”

I smiled. “It didn’t come up. They are focused on the person who did this to him. Though they did find Caleb’s fingerprints in the tower where the victim died. At some point, he’s going to have to tell the truth.” I went to leave the room. “The helicopter will be here in a few hours,” I said. “That will give you a bit of grace.”

Caleb was a mess, but he didn’t deserve to go down for a murder I was certain he hadn’t committed.

Without someone to guide me through the upstairs hallways, I lost my way.

“Darn.”

My legs were stiff, and the last thing I needed was to walk unnecessarily. I made it down another long hallway, only to find I’d gone even farther from the stairwell.

Tempted to sit down on the floor and wait for someone to find me, I forced myself forward.

Why had I given Mara the walkie-talkie?

There was a strange noise behind me. Like a shuffling.

I turned and swung my cane, like a bat.

No one was there.

The wind rattled the window at the end of the hall, and it was as if the whole house held its breath.

I shook myself.

“You’re tired, and the castle talks. It’s the wind or boards creaking. It’s

old. And I'm standing in a hallway whispering to myself."

The Gothic castle was gorgeous in so many ways, but it also had a fair amount of craosach factor, as Mara called it. I assumed that was Gaelic for creepy.

There were places in the world that no matter how well appointed they might be with furnishings, wallpaper, and art, there was an air about them. As if ghosts might walk the halls.

Not that I believed in the supernatural, but if the battle tapestries on the wall were an indication, this castle had seen some things.

Mara's stories about ghosts and fairies were getting to me. The Scots believed in both wholeheartedly. And who was I to argue with their culture?

I paused to listen for noise, but the howling wind outside was the only sound.

I stared down yet another long hallway. Perhaps I should have left a bread-crumbs trail so I'd remember each one I'd traveled down. Halfway down, I knew it was the wrong one, but there was a door at the very end with an "Exit" sign above it.

For the building to be up to code, Ewan had said he put the signs in on every floor.

As I put my hand on the door, something thumped nearby.

Probably someone getting ready for bed, but I didn't look back.

I took a breath and then opened the door. It led to a narrow stairwell. The overhead light flickered and then went out.

Great.

I could have gone back into the hallway, but when would I find another set of stairs? Down was the direction I had to go.

Holding on to the railing, I turned sideways. I couldn't trust my legs, so going down slowly was my only option. I'd made it down to the next floor when the door from the floor I'd been on creaked open.

"Hello? Is anyone there?" I called out.

No answer, but there were footsteps.

My stomach twisted, and my heart raced. I took one step at a time, but perhaps a bit faster than I'd been going. I had one more floor to go, but the footsteps above me were hurried.

“Please be careful,” I said. “It’s quite dark, and the stairs are steep.”

They didn’t stop.

I increased my pace, but by the time I reached the bottom floor, the person behind me no longer hesitated.

They were after me.

As I opened the door to the first-floor hallway a shadow of a man blanketed the back wall.

I raced in and was surprised to find myself near the dungeon. The door was locked, but I had one of the keys.

My hands shook as I missed the first time I tried to put the key in the hole. Second try was a success. I ran inside and locked the door.

Breath coming out in a pant, I waited.

The door rattled violently.

Something metal hit the concrete floor below me.

I’m going to die.

Chapter Nineteen

At the same time metal hit the floor below me, the door to the dungeon shook again. My knee gave out, and I fell back onto the stairs. I'd be a sitting duck if whoever was on the other side made it through the door.

"Who's in here?" I half screamed. Then I held my cane as a weapon.

"The saints, you scared me," Abigail said at the bottom of the stairs. "What are you doing up there? Why are you yelling?"

"Someone followed me from Caleb's room, and I don't think it was to have a friendly chat."

The door behind me had stopped banging, but I had no desire to check whether my assailant was gone.

"We must be getting close, aye?"

"Possibly." As I followed her to our makeshift autopsy room, I told her about the confession.

"Even if Caleb was the one who pushed the gargoyle—and he didn't admit to that—who just followed me down the hall? More importantly, who poisoned Caleb?"

"His partner," she said.

"There's no way around it. I think Robbie had second thoughts and didn't want to go through with the plan. The partner killed him and then tried to take out Angie. Mara's poisoning was probably accidental."

"But why try to kill you?"

The body had been moved back into the freezer, but Abigail had equipment going on every table. Not that we had much of it.

"Sit," she ordered.

I sat on a stool in the middle of the room. As soon as my butt hit the

chair, I relaxed. My legs ached, though.

“I think I talked to the wrong—or in this case, the *right* person. They think I’m on to them. But why then risk everything by trying to kill Caleb? If he isn’t in on it, what do they think he saw?”

“Fair warning: Ewan is determined to arrest Caleb because he was there when Robbie died,” Abigail said.

“I spoke to him. We have some time to figure things out, as he’ll be in the hospital a fair bit. Did you find anything in his bloodwork that is different from what we took earlier?”

“I only found traces of the ethylene glycol, which means his body had probably processed a great deal of it already. The fact that you were pushing fluids through his body saved his life.”

“He is not safe yet. Any chance of checking his liver and kidney function?”

She shook her head. “I don’t have the right equipment. Other than that his urine was high in ketones and bacteria, I can’t tell you much more. I don’t even have the right equipment to grow the bacteria to see what it is.”

I nodded. “It’s enough to know he’s fighting an infection. We’ll add an antibiotic to his IV, a general one.”

She chewed on her lip. “We don’t have a lot of supplies left. We weren’t counting on something like this.”

“Hey, don’t worry. If you hadn’t made me such a wonderful kit, we wouldn’t even have had what we needed to save our friends’ lives. I’m in awe of your talent, Abigail. You don’t give yourself enough credit.

Abigail smiled.

“Will you go up with me to administer the IV? I think we should travel in pairs until the wedding is over.” I had no desire to climb all those stairs again, but none of us was moving around this castle alone.

“Agreed.”

★ ★ ★

The next morning came way too soon. We had a wedding breakfast with Angie and her side of the family. The groom would dine in another part of the castle. Mara and I didn’t even speak as we readied ourselves. We were

exhausted.

After I told her what had happened, she'd stayed up half the night listening for the door to open.

I, on the other hand, had slept quite well for a whole four hours, and I needed coffee to be congenial.

When I opened our door, I ran smack into Ewan, who grabbed me to keep me from falling.

"Ugh," I said as my face hit his hard chest.

He wore a peacoat over a cable-knit sweater, and a tweed flat cap that matched his navy outerwear. The man should have been on billboards of why women should move to Scotland.

"Sorry, Doc."

"What's up?"

"The helicopter left with Caleb, as we had to wait for the winds to die down a wee bit more. His mum left with him."

I frowned. "I should have gone with him."

He shook his head. "A doctor from the hospital came with the flight crew. Abigail gave him all the notes you made and the list of drugs used. We didn't want to wake you."

"I—thank you." I'd been about to argue, but Abigail was quite a capable medical professional. I wasn't worried.

His eyebrows had lifted, as if he'd readied for a fight.

"Anything else?"

"Aye, Abigail wanted you to know his fever was gone, and he was lucid this morning."

"That's a miracle," Mara said from behind me. I'd forgotten she was there.

"Aye," Ewan said. "Thanks to the doc, he'll have a chance—though he'll be spending time in jail."

I rolled my eyes. "Ewan, he's not your killer."

"So, you found some evidence?"

"Not exactly. But why would he poison himself? Someone tried to hurt him."

"Or he was looking for some kind of high and did it to himself."

“After he was in a coma from drug withdrawal? I don’t think so.”

“He admitted to me he was there with Robbie,” he said. “His fingerprints are all over the place in the tower. And he’s strong enough to have pushed that gargoyle onto ya.”

If I were going to make him understand, I needed proof. Ewan dealt in facts, not hunches. That was one of the first lessons I’d learned from the constable.

“Right. I still think someone else is in play.”

He shook his head. “Then don’t go running off by yourself. Stick to her,” he said to Mara. Then he was off.

★ ★ ★

We were nearly blinded when we walked into the front dining area. The sun shone brightly through the windows bouncing light off high drifts of snow surrounding the house.

I wanted to scream bright light, cross my fingers like Frankenstein’s monster, but I didn’t think anyone here would get the joke.

Tables dressed in purple tulle had been spaced throughout the room. Giant bows in orange tulle were tied on the chairs. Beautiful flower arrangements adorned all the tables, which were set with china, gold, and crystal.

“I never understood how these colors would work, but they do,” Mara whispered.

She was right. Instead of being garish, which was what I’d expected, it was quite elegant and beautiful.

“I guess the roads are clear. I don’t recognize half of these people,” Jasper said beside us.

“We know Lulu,” I said.

She was dressed in sixties chic today, with her hair piled on top of her head and trademark blue eyeshadow that never seemed out of place on her face.

One would never know the bride had been poisoned and conked on the head, a few days ago. Angie was most definitely back to her old self as she flitted from table to table.

She wore a black lace dress that fit snugly against her curves. Only she could get away with wearing black on her wedding day.

“Hello, sweet friends,” she said. Then she sat down with us.

“Shouldn’t you be with your family?” Jasper said.

She rolled her eyes. “Except for Lulu, who will be joining us after she says hello to Mom and the steps, they are all driving me nuts.”

“Wicked people,” Lulu said as she sat down next to her niece. “After everything you’ve been through with this weather, you deserve the wedding of your dreams, luv.” She held up her champagne glass.

“Here, here,” Jasper said.

We clinked glasses.

A full Scottish breakfast was served by the waitstaff, many of whom I didn’t recognize.

“I guess Ewan was able to get everything cleared out earlier than we thought,” I said.

“They’ve been working since last night,” Lulu said. “Everything from Sea Isle to here was clear as can be. It’s good, since half the town will be here for the wedding.

“Anything exciting happen the last few days? What did I miss?” Lulu asked.

Mara sputtered and we laughed.

Lulu looked at us like we were crazy.

Angie gave her a rundown, though she didn’t know much about Caleb or my trek down the hallway the night before.

Mara filled them in, and Angie’s fist hit the table.

“When we find out who did this, I’m going to murder them,” she said through gritted teeth. “And you lot will help because that’s what friends do.”

She was right. Friends backed each other up, and it didn’t seem like the time to bring up my Hippocratic oath.

After a full Scottish breakfast, it was time for the bride and her wedding party to get ready for the big event. Mara, Jasper, and I wished her well and headed back to our respective rooms.

“I still want to check the garages,” I said.

“It’s going to be a mess out there.” Mara yawned. “And you aren’t going

anywhere without backup. I need a nap if I'm going to make it through the day. And you need to rest your legs.”

I sighed. She wasn't wrong.

“Fine.”

While she climbed back into bed, I sat on the small sofa by the fire. I opened my notebook. My phone dinged beside me. Loads of messages pinged, one after another.

Most were from patients wondering when the practice would be open again. Since I'd taken over the office, this was the longest we'd been closed. When I'd agreed to be moral support at the wedding for Angie, I hadn't realized we'd be cut off from the rest of the world for so long.

I'd never given out my cell number to patients, but I'd used it for follow-up calls, and someone in town had shared it.

None of the messages were emergencies. I'd send out an email to everyone when we were back in town. But I needed a vacation from what was supposed to have been our vacation.

The messages meant I had access to the outside world.

I opened my notebook and focused on one of the first names on my list. I did a search for Caleb on my phone.

The man had pages of scandal in tabloids, stories about dating starlets and arrests. He was in his early twenties, so he must have started on his wayward path when he was quite young. The headlines were shameless, and I couldn't imagine living a life in the public eye like that.

It was as if his every move was followed by cameras.

While I understood the Carthages had incredible wealth, I hadn't realized they were such an A-list family.

The stories about his brother were focused on charity events and business. There couldn't be two more different people. A few articles and the announcement about his engagement to Angie surfaced, but nothing untoward in any of them.

Angie was shown in pictures with him, both wearing designer clothes whose labels I didn't even know, and looking every bit the perfect match—even with her pink, purple, or platinum hair.

They were like Scottish royalty.

There were several online business articles about Mr. Carthage. Nothing personal, though. Mrs. Carthage sat on the boards of several charities. The couple was shown at several art and charity events—he with his permanent scowl; she, perfectly coiffed and always wearing Chanel or some other top designer.

I couldn't imagine living with a man like that. My husband had been duplicitous, but he had been kind. That's part of what had made his death so difficult. In his own way, he'd loved me. Of that, I had been certain.

I moved on to Angie's side of the family. It dawned on me, her father hadn't been at the breakfast, but no one seemed to be worried about his absence. I had to remember to ask Angie about it.

I started with her mom, but there wasn't much in the way of news about her.

The second stepmom was an artist and had recently had a gallery showing. I remembered Angie telling me about her. There were photos of that night, and the other stepmothers were in attendance, except for one—Dara.

I didn't find much of anything on the others, and nothing on Dara, the current stepmom. As in no presence online at all.

That wasn't unusual in Scotland. The Scots weren't as into social media as most Americans. I'd never had time for it, though I'd acquiesced when I moved here, in order to keep up with some of my friends in Seattle.

Odd. I no longer considered the States home. Sea Isle was the place where I was always meant to be.

I searched deeper for Dara. It was odd that a search pulled up nothing. Not even a marriage announcement could be found.

Her room had been much the same. Nothing personal out, and everything had been tidied and cleaned up.

She had no reason to stop the wedding, and I couldn't imagine her hurting Angie. She'd appeared to care about her stepdaughter. Still, there was something about her that bothered me.

The way she'd said I'd better watch out when we worked on the flowers had stuck with me. Her tone had been threatening.

But why would she hurt Angie, whom she seemingly adored?

Caleb, the bad boy of the Carthages, had a history and loads of motive. Not the least of which was destroying his near-perfect brother's heart by killing his beloved Angie.

While his mind had been drug addled, that didn't mean he wasn't clever enough to think of a defense for himself. There was someone else in the picture, but that didn't mean Caleb hadn't murdered Robbie.

I didn't want to admit it, but maybe Ewan was right.

It might have been Caleb all along.

Chapter Twenty

For the first time in days, we were allowed outside. The sun shone brightly, but it brought absolutely no heat to our long walk up the hill to the church. Ewan and his men had done a wonderful job of clearing the path, so that we could easily make it while holding up Angie's dress.

She'd sent everyone ahead, as she would be making her grand entrance soon. Halfway up, she stopped and turned to Mara and me.

"I need to know if he killed Robbie," she whispered.

"Caleb?" Mara asked.

Angie sighed. "No, the man I'm about to marry. You two are so good to me, and I have a feeling you'd hide evidence if it pointed to him, just to make me happy."

I sort of snort laughed.

"This isn't funny. I'm serious."

"How is it protecting you if we let you marry a murderer?" I asked.

She frowned. "Oh, I hadn't thought about it like that."

"He left his stag early, but you told us he was passed out in your room when you left the hen party. And we know there is no way he'd hurt you. The question is, why don't you know it?"

She scrunched up her face and then blew out a breath. "I do."

"That's what you're supposed to say to him," Mara joked.

"I'm scared," she said. "Someone tried to kill me to keep me from marrying him, and I think it just hit me how short life can be for some people. Look at Robbie. I don't know the reason he was here, but he didn't deserve to die.

"And who threw the gargoyle at you? Caleb? Why? I have so many

questions.” Her skin turned pale—well, more than usual.

“Stop. Take a deep breath,” I ordered. “I mean it—breathe.”

She was about to argue.

“Do it or we drop the dress.” Mara held her train up.

Angie’s eyes widened. Then she took a deep breath.

“And another one,” I coached.

She did it again.

“You’re spiraling, and you have cold feet. It’s thirty degrees so that’s understandable,” Mara said. “But you love him, and I’ve never seen a man more in love with a woman. So, in the immortal words of our friend the doctor, standing right there, *‘Let’s do this.’*”

That made us all laugh. I did have a habit of saying that.

“Come on,” I said. “I’m freezing.” That wasn’t a lie. My boots were killing me. They were tight around my bruised calf. After the wedding, I’d find some other shoes to wear.

As we came to the top of the hill, the church—well, it was really more of a Gothic cathedral—came into view. The perfect place for our friend to marry.

“I’ve never seen a more beautiful church,” I said. There were arched windows with stained glass, and stone walls. The high-pitched roof led to a sculptured steeple, and the church bell rang loudly as we neared the entrance.

A man paced back and forth in the vestibule.

“Lass, finally. I thought you’d run away and left us with all that cake.”

“Da, I was afraid you might not make it. Dara said your plane from London was late.”

He kissed her cheek and then helped her pull her veil down. “Blasted weather,” he said. “Those Londoners don’t know what to do with so much snow. Do you have cold feet? You seem down at the heel. I’ll put you in the rig and take you home right now. Just say the word, darlin’.”

I’d never met him, but I quite liked Angie’s dad.

“Da, walking in these shoes takes time.” She showed him her six-inch heels. She’d debated between those and a pair of purple Converse All-Stars. I would have gone for the latter. Warmer and more comfortable than the red-soled Louis Vuitton’s she wore. Another gift from Damien.

“Aye, women and their shoes. Well, lass. You ready?”

She glanced back at us and smiled. “I am.”

We gave her a quick goodbye and then squeezed past the bridesmaids blocking the entry. They were dressed in varying shades of purple. Even Tiffany and Marianne smiled today as we passed.

As we entered through the doors, everyone glanced back at us. Damien’s attention had been on the priest, and he turned toward us. I gave him a lame thumbs-up, and he smiled.

The church was full. Mara and I squeezed into the last pew, along with Ewan and Jasper.

They wore formal jackets and ties with their kilts.

“You both look handsome,” Mara whispered.

The two men smiled.

“You’re looking gorgeous, and you too, Doc,” Jasper said.

“We clean up well,” I joked.

“Aye, we do,” Ewan said. He gave me a strange look.

What is that about?

The doors opened, and the bagpiper played a haunting tune I didn’t recognize.

The bridesmaids came down, and then Angie.

The crowd gasped, as they should have. She was angelic and beautiful in her perfectly designed wedding gown that was a mix of formal and punk. The tight bodice of lace, sat atop a full pleated skirt. Inside the pleats was her trademark purple in satin, which was only visible when she walked. Her family’s plaid lay across her chest.

Damien’s face brought tears to my eyes. If she’d had any doubts, they had to have been assuaged when she saw him. She’d already gone past us, but I was certain she smiled at him as well. He reached for her as if he couldn’t wait, and she was only midway down the aisle.

A handkerchief appeared before me, and I glanced up to find Ewan watching me carefully.

“Thanks,” I mouthed, and took it from him.

The acoustics were poor, so we couldn’t hear much of what was going on up front. Only the minister wore a microphone, and he spoke half Gaelic

and half English, and had a heavy Scottish accent. I didn't understand much.

An hour later, Angie and Damien came back down the aisle, laughing all the way.

We waited for the bridal party to exit, before following everyone down to the castle for an early dinner. The sun had gone down a while ago, and the temperature had dropped again. Not that it had been warm before.

Since we were some of the last to leave, we arrived after everyone had gone into the dining room. Angie and Damien were in the hall, talking to his mother.

"Aye, we understand," Damien said. "I didn't expect you to be here at all, Ma. Truly. I'm grateful, but we understand."

The other woman kissed his cheek and then hugged Angie. I'm not sure who was more surprised, the bride or the groom.

Then his mother turned toward us.

"Oh, Doctor, may I speak to you?"

I nodded.

Ewan didn't leave me alone, but he did step away, nearer the door.

Cheers went up in the ballroom as the happy couple stepped inside.

"Thank you," she said. "The doctors told me he wouldn't have survived were it not for your care. His heart is weak, and his kidneys—they aren't certain what will happen there. We must take it one day at a time."

"That's a good attitude. You both have a long road ahead, but with you on his side—well, that's a bonus."

"Your kindness is not deserved, but I'm grateful you were here. There is one thing—" She frowned.

"What is it?"

"He promised me he had nothing to do with Robbie's murder. I believe him. I'm his mother, but I asked if there could be no more secrets between us. I would help him in any way I could. But he swore on his nan's grave that he wasn't involved.

"He loved my mother. Probably out of everyone in the family, she is who he was closest to. I understand that we shouldn't trust addicts, but like I said, I believe him."

She'd been speaking rapidly and stopped to take a breath.

I wasn't sure how to reply to what she'd said. The evidence was damning, and I'd been duped by the last killer I'd tangled with, so trusting my instincts in situations like this—well, I simply didn't have the experience Ewan had.

He was a barrister as well as the constable, for many years in Sea Isle. That, and he had a great deal more experience with criminals.

"It's good he has you on his side," I said. That seemed the most nonpolitical thing I could say.

"I understand we come off as spoiled and entitled. Those remarks are deserved," she said. "But please help me convince the police that my son is not a murderer. He is many things, but he isn't that. You need to find the real killer—the person who harmed my son."

I nodded. "When I get home, I'll be better able to check our findings with the proper equipment."

"That's all I ask. I must go. I didn't want to miss the wedding, but I don't want to leave Caleb alone for too long. He's miserable."

After she left, I stood there, not sure what to think.

"He's guilty," Ewan whispered.

"Of something," I said. "But murder? I'm not certain. We need to keep our eye out for the petite dark-haired woman the housekeeper and Tommy saw."

He sighed. "Neither could identify any of the guests from the photos. They may have got it wrong."

"Not even Samantha?"

"Nay. She said too many of the women looked alike. She'd not paid much attention to the one who stayed when the others left."

"But the kitchen staff would have seen her. Ideally, if she took the dishes to be washed."

"Aye. We checked. The bowl is missing. She—or whoever it was—never took it back."

"They stole the bowl?"

He shrugged. "Or hid it somewhere."

Ewan guided me into the ballroom, which had been set up elaborately for the wedding dinner. Much like the breakfast, there were beautiful place

settings, flowers, and linens, but the overall feel was even more elegant.

Luckily, I'd been seated with my friends. I'm sure I had Angie to thank for that. We were back in a corner, which made it easy to watch the room. Haggis was the main protein, but I'd opted for a vegan meal when I'd RSVP'd.

I'd tried haggis—once. Mara and her family swore if it was made right, I'd love it as much as any Scot.

They were wrong.

I was adventurous when it came to food, but it had to taste good.

Over the first course, there were several toasts. Angie's dad, her mother, and others told funny stories about the couple. As that sort of thing goes, it was far less embarrassing than at other weddings I'd attended.

While it took me a minute to notice, Marianne was missing. She'd been there for the ceremony, but every seat was full for the dinner, and I couldn't find her anywhere.

"Have any of you seen Marianne?" I asked.

Abigail had been about to eat some of her soup. "When I went to check on Tommy, she had one of the valet's bring her car around. Maybe she didn't feel right celebrating given what happened to her cousin."

"I—you're probably right."

Mara cocked her head. "Or she might have been making a fast getaway. She probably has all the evidence you need in her trunk."

Ewan, who was seated on my left, choked a bit. Instinct took over, and I patted his back.

"Are you okay?"

He put his napkin to his mouth and nodded.

"I don't think it's her," I said. "Why would she kill her cousin?"

"We are not discussing the suspects," Ewan said. "This is an—"

"Ongoing investigation," everyone said at the same time, and then we laughed. Well, everyone except Ewan.

"There's something I need to check on," he said. Then he was gone.

"Aww. I think we hurt the Laird's feelings." Mara smiled.

"He'll get over it," I said. "Abigail's right, though. She probably needed away from this place." But she'd just moved up my list—motive or not.

"Do you think Caleb did all of this?" Mara asked.

“You know, better than anyone, my thoughts about that. He had the means, motive, and opportunity, but it doesn’t track. I think our killer or killers are still here.”

Everyone turned at the same time to glance over the crowd.

“I don’t feel like I have any more clues than I did four days ago, when all of this began.” I sighed. Being a sleuth wasn’t as easy as Vera and the rest of the gang on Brit Box and Acorn TV made it seem.

The only person in the room who wasn’t talking or smiling was Mr. Carthage. He appeared as if he wanted to be anywhere else but in that room. He shoved his food away and crossed his arms. With his ridiculous scowl, he reminded me of a petulant child.

His youngest son had been accused of murder, and his eldest son had married a woman he didn’t like. That man was prickly and sour on the best of days, but this situation had not gone to plan.

The current stepmom, Dara, pointed a finger at Angie’s dad. They wore fierce looks.

“I wonder what that’s about. She does not look happy,” I said.

Mara and Abigail followed my line of sight.

“Oh, maybe he was up to no good,” Mara whispered, “and she found out. I thought it was highly suspicious that he didn’t make it before the storm hit. Maybe he was hanging out with Angie’s mom number five, or is it six?”

“Mara,” Abigail chided.

“I don’t blame him,” Jasper said. “That many ex-wives in one place, who would want to do that?”

He had a point.

“From what Angie said, he’d been stuck in London because of the weather. He couldn’t fly out until this morning,” I said.

“Way to ruin our fun,” Mara said.

I grinned. “Well, we don’t know why he was in London or who he might have been with there.”

“That’s the spirit, Em,” Mara said.

The stepmom stood and then tossed her napkin on her chair.

Angie’s dad grabbed her wrist and tried to pull her down to her seat, but she pushed off his hand. Then she left the room.

“Maybe I should check on her,” I said. “She seems upset.”

Angie whispered something to her groom. He frowned and then nodded. She rose from her seat and followed the stepmother.

Mara and I were up and out of the room before Jasper and Abigail could finish their soup.

Angie had stopped the woman halfway down the hall.

“Luv, it’s nothing for you to worry about,” Dara said. “He’s just pushing my buttons.”

“Are you ill?” I asked Angie. “We saw you jump up quickly.”

Dara turned and narrowed her eyes at me.

“My sweet stepdaughter was just checking on me,” she said. “Nothing to get your nose out of joint about.”

She was not happy with me for some reason.

“My da is being his cantankerous self,” Angie said. “Please don’t leave — not just yet. I can move you to another table.”

The woman turned to Angie. “No, luv. You’re right. I let him get to me. Let me freshen up a wee bit, and I’ll come back.” She took off.

“Sorry we butted in. We just wanted to make certain you were okay,” Mara said. “We didn’t mean to—”

Angie waved a hand. “If you ask me, they are equally awful to each other. She’s extremely high strung, and my da—he’s a highly suspicious man. He thinks she’s having an affair. He saw something in their room. At least, that’s the bit I overheard.”

I knew it.

Mara and I exchanged glances, but I gave a slight shake of my head. This didn’t seem the right time to share that I’d heard a man in Dara’s room when I’d stumbled against her door.

When I checked her room, there was no sign of another man. That didn’t mean he wasn’t staying in another room and showing up at hers for some fun.

Maybe that’s what I’d picked up on with Dara. She was an unpleasant woman, but perhaps the affair was what she’d been trying to hide. When I’d questioned her about a man in her room, she’d told me it was someone on the telly.

That’s why she didn’t like me.

“Nothing for you to worry about,” Mara said. “Everything is so wonderful tonight—don’t let them get to you. Let’s go celebrate.”

Angie laughed. “First, come help me wee. I’ve been holding it since the ceremony started.”

We did as she asked, holding up her wedding skirts as friends will. Then we all washed up and headed back to the dinner.

By the time all the courses were served, I was so full. A nap was imminent.

Mara gently punched me in the shoulder. “Wake up. It’s time for the reception.”

“Scottish weddings are very long.”

Jasper, Abigail, and even Ewan, who had returned during the fourth course, laughed.

“Aye,” Mara said, “but next is dancing. That will wake us up. There are hours to go.”

Hours? All I wanted to do was curl up in the fetal position and sleep for days. But this was my last chance to observe everyone before they went on their way.

While I hadn’t known Robbie, I’d heard the stories about him. He didn’t seem the type to hatch a plot to stop a wedding. More likely, Caleb had told the truth about what Robbie said about him doing something wrong but wanting to make it right.

Maybe he’d been determined to confess all to Angie and Damien.

“*Supposition. No evidence.*” I could hear Ewan in my head.

In my theory, though, Caleb became the perfect scapegoat. He’d been half out of his mind going through withdrawals over the past several days. If things had gone wrong with Robbie, the killer might have used Caleb without him even being aware.

He’d been wasted most of his time at the castle. No one was at their best with that kind of brain fog. What had happened had taken cleverness and premeditation.

None of the evidence we were missing had been found in Caleb’s room. I’d even gone through his things with his mother in the room. She’d given me permission.

Someone had used him. Maybe even tried to kill him with the poison. If he were gone, whatever he might have seen would go with him. He was the perfect scapegoat.

Then there was the mean woman Tommy had told us about. She'd been yelling at Robbie near the garage.

"I wish Tommy and Samantha could have picked out the woman they both saw," I said, as we headed to the other ballroom for the reception.

"Who is Samantha?" Mara stood beside me as we waited to enter the reception area.

I explained.

"Tommy saw a woman arguing with Robbie. If we could identify her—that might be the puzzle piece we're missing. But Ewan said neither of them could tell them which woman it was on the list. Too many of them looked the same."

"The same?" Mara appeared puzzled.

"Yes. That's it." Everything clicked in my brain.

"You know who the killer is?"

"Sort of," I said. "Who at this wedding looks nearly identical to one another?"

"The steps," Mara said. "They have the same sort of appearance. I nearly mistook one of them for another tonight."

"Exactly."

"They all seem to love Angie, though. Why would they want to stop the wedding or risk killing her?"

"Because we don't know the whole story. I have someone in mind, but we'll need to watch all the steps carefully at the reception. Whichever one it is, they could leave and dump all the evidence."

"Please don't tell me we have to search their rooms again."

"No. I have another plan."

She sighed. "I have a feeling it's dangerous."

She was right.

Chapter Twenty-One

The doors to the other ballroom opened, and the crowd rushed into the party. I held back a bit, pretending to be interested in my phone. I made certain each of the stepmothers made it into the ballroom before I followed them.

After all the wine at dinner, the crowd grew noisy. Angie, who had changed once again into a shorter dress made for dancing, and her purple Converse sneakers, came in with her groom.

They stopped just inside the ballroom and kissed. The crowd roared with joviality.

The happiness on the wedding couple's faces made my heart sing. Oh, to be young and in love!

The reception was held in the larger ballroom, which had been transformed into a club-like atmosphere. Specifically, a gothic-punk club. With purple and black tulle, mixed with silver and crystal. It was fun and classy at the same time.

"I can't believe we're at the end," Mara said as she sat down at our table. Angie had been kind and put our little crew together again. Jasper sat down on the other side of me.

"That cake is amazing," I said. The eight tiers were silver and white, with fresh flowers trailing down and swirling around each layer.

"Is it really a different flavor on every tier?"

Jasper nodded. He was so dapper in his black tux top and blue and green kilt. His eyes were a bit glassy from all the wine.

I'd only had half a glass; I needed to keep my wits about me. I was determined to find the real culprit behind this mess before everyone left.

"So, we have to try a slice of every flavor," Mara said.

“Basically,” I joked.

The cake was a pure representation of my friend Angie and her many facets. She deserved this special day filled with love. Even my cold, jaded heart believed it was possible for love to endure.

A cheer went up, and Angie and Damien stood on the dance floor. Her hair had been left down in a riot of purple curls. She was a vision, and Damien couldn’t keep his eyes off her.

“She’s so pretty,” Mara said.

Jasper whistled loudly, and we clapped.

Angie’s glorious smile tugged at my heart. Pure joy and excitement poured off her. This was why we’d gone through so much to get her here.

The band struck up a happy tune, and Damien pulled her to him. They started out slow dancing, and then, as the music morphed into the punk anthem “Rise Above,” by Black Flag, they jumped and bounced around the floor.

Cheers went up again, and we all bounced in place. Well, I sort of bounced. My legs wouldn’t allow much. It was more rocking back and forth for me.

I’m not a huge punk rock fan, but Angie had insisted Mara and I be indoctrinated by some of the greats. She’d forced us to listen to some of her musical choices for this evening.

While her new father-in-law had his arms crossed and a smirk on his face, everyone, including her mom and dad, jumped up and down.

I glanced around the room. The steps were at a table together, but one of them was missing. They all faced away, so it was impossible to tell which one.

“The perfect beginning,” I said as the music changed to a Scottish jig—or maybe it was Irish. I’d never tell my friends I couldn’t tell the difference. Some of the attendees stayed on the floor to show their footwork, but the happy couple headed over to the table of cakes.

“Oh, I guess I’m on,” Jasper said.

“Come with me,” he ordered. We followed him, along with several of the children in attendance to the table.

He cut the first slice, and then another, and handed the crystal plates to

the bride and groom. Rather than stuffing the slices in each other's faces, as happens in America at some weddings, they crossed arms, and fed themselves and then kissed.

Sweet and romantic—as punk rock as Angie had wanted her wedding, her lovely heart had shown through every moment.

“Jasper, it’s as delicious as it is beautiful,” Angie claimed. She let go of her groom to give our favorite baker a hug. “I cannot thank you enough. Everything is perfect.”

“She’s right,” Damien said. “Best cake I’ve ever had.”

My favorite perfectionist blushed. “Do you want to try another layer?”

Angie and Damien stared at each other and then nodded.

“We want a thin slice of every layer,” Angie said. “We won’t be one of those couples who doesn’t eat the cake at their wedding.”

“She’s right. Give us one of each flavor,” Damien said.

Everyone around them laughed.

Mara and I waited in line behind the children in attendance. Many of them were from Sea Isle. I loved that Angie had included the townspeople in her wedding.

Since she’d spent most of her summers in Sea Isle with her grandparents, she considered it a second home.

Two women took over the cake delivery system from Jasper.

While I too wanted to try every layer, I settled for the chocolate ganache and raspberry one. Mara picked the lemon custard layer, and we promised to share bites.

Jasper took a slice of the cherry cake. He handed Mara his plate and went to get us some coffees.

I needed a caffeine push if I was to make it through the evening.

People moved around the dance floor. I liked that generations of her family were out there, including her Aunt Lulu. My favorite shop owner, dressed from head to toe in bright green sequins, danced with one of the groomsmen, at least fifty years younger, who seemed to be having as much fun as she was.

“When I grow up, I want to be like Lulu,” I said.

“Me too.” Mara agreed.

“Me, three.” Jasper sat our coffees on the table. “To be that free and not care what anyone thinks. She lives her life as if every day might be her last. I adore her.”

“We do too,” Mara said.

“Angie is on her way to being just like her,” I said. I checked the stepmothers’ table. They all seemed to be in attendance.

“I’m glad all of the drama is over,” Jasper said. “If any of you died, I’m not sure what I would have done. I love our little family.”

“Aww,” Mara said. “Speaking of which, where is Abigail? She skipped out of dinner early.”

“I’m sure she’s checking on Tommy.” I pulled my phone out of the pocket of my dress.

“There she is.” Jasper pointed toward the dance floor.

Abigail and Henry danced stiffly together, but Henry’s grin spoke loads.

“That may be the most adorable thing I’ve seen in months,” I said.

“Do you think she knows?” Mara asked.

“Knows what?” Jasper asked.

“That Henry has moved far beyond a crush,” Ewan said as he sat next to Mara.

“You made it back,” I said. I was surprised.

“Angie insisted on it. My men are set up outside. They’ll be checking the cars as they are brought up by the valet.”

“I thought they checked them last night.”

“Aye, but as you said, the evidence may have been moved more than once.”

“I’m so confused,” Jasper said. “What did I miss?”

“So, you believe me about Caleb?”

“Nay.”

I rolled my eyes.

“But you are right that he most likely was working with someone.”

“I’m still doing ‘em up for attempted murder. Caleb won’t say a word about that gargoyle, and he already admitted he was there when Robbie died. He’ll be spending time in jail. No matter.”

“Won’t his dad get him out on bail again?” Mara asked.

“The prosecutor will claim he’s a flight risk, but you never know.” He stretched his legs under the table and leaned back in his chair. It was as if he had the weight of the world on his shoulders.

“I hope he rots,” Mara said. “Even if he didn’t try to kill Angie, he knew about Robbie. He’s a louse.”

“And don’t forget, you almost died,” Jasper added. “And the doc.”

“We all survived,” I said. Thank the gods, as I couldn’t bear to lose my friends.

“No thanks to the Carthages,” Ewan said.

It was the way he eyed Damien’s parents that made me wonder if there was more to the story.

“What made you change your mind about the second killer?”

Ewan shook his head. “He’s smart enough to keep his mouth shut—though he still claims he didn’t bring Robbie here. Nor did he push that statue on you. Can’t trust a word out of his mouth,” Ewan said, and then he frowned.

“What is it?”

He shrugged. “He’s a reprobate and self-entitled, but is he smart enough to have coordinated all of this? And why poison himself?”

“You were right about that. Seems a painful way to go, given he saw what happened to Robbie.”

“There was a great deal of chemistry involved,” I said. “I—”

“What?” Mara asked.

“While he should have come forward about being with Robbie, the only thing he saw that night was Robbie vomiting. Caleb only left because the victim insisted on it.”

Ewan grunted.

“Someone had to know about the antifreeze. Someone strong pushed that gargoyle on me. And he did have an alibi when someone followed me to the dungeon.”

“Wine cellar,” Ewan interjected. “Wait, what?”

“Ruh ro,” Mara tried her best at a Scottish Scooby-Doo voice.

I might have laughed if it hadn’t been for the expression on Ewan’s face.

“Did I forget to tell you about last night? So much has happened.”

He crossed his arms.

“Right. So, when I left Caleb’s room last night, I got a little lost upstairs. I turned the wrong way—this castle is much too large. You need those you-are-here maps on the hallway walls.”

He stared at me and frowned even more deeply.

“Anyway, everything was fine, but I thought someone was following me. I headed to the back stairwell, and then I knew someone was there—heavy footsteps on the floor above me. I called out, but no one answered. The lights had gone out in the stairwell, and I couldn’t see anyone, but I heard the footsteps.

“When I opened the door to the first floor, the hallway showed the shadow of a man just a few steps above me.”

“You’re certain it was a man?” Ewan asked.

“It was only a silhouette, but yes. I’m quite familiar with anatomy. I ran for the dun—wine cellar—and used my key to get in. I locked the door, but he banged against it and tried to get in. Abigail will back me up. She was there.”

“Hold on,” Mara said. “I had a lot of wine, but that means we are still looking for a male and a female?”

“Well, as much as Ewan would like it to be, Caleb was not the one chasing me down those stairs.

Ewan shook his head. “Why didn’t you tell me? I have my men focused on a woman.”

“A lot has happened the last few days. I’ve forgotten who knows what.”

He grunted again.

Jasper stabbed his cake. “So, we still have two killers in the castle. Thanks for ruining my buzz.”

The band played a quieter song, and there were several couples out on the dance floor, including Henry and Abigail.

They were so sweet together.

While his wife danced with their son, Mr. Carthage sat at the table sneering. The man was impossible. Even now, he probably hadn’t given up on his scheming.

Was he the kind of man who would allow his son to take the blame for

murder?

The answer was a resounding yes.

Damien's father glanced at his phone and then stood. He headed out one of the side entrances.

"I need some air. I'll be back in a minute," I said.

"I'll come with you," Mara said.

"I'll be fine. Just need to clear my head."

I still had a bit of a limp, but I made it to the hall just in time to see Mr. Carthage turn to the right. I followed. Waited until he made his way down another hall, and then followed again.

But I waited too long. I lost him. To the right was the outside area that led to the garages.

To the left, I couldn't remember. That passageway was dark, though, and the one on the way to the garage had the gas lamps lit.

If he wasn't down there, then I'd circle back.

I caught up with him again as he entered a side room off the back area leading to the garages and carriage houses.

I was out of breath and stopped just outside the door I'd seen him go into.

"Where is she?" he growled.

"I'm right here, and we have a guest," a female voice said from behind me.

And then something slammed into my head, and the world went black.

Chapter Twenty-Two

When I awoke, it took a few minutes for me to understand where I was. My head ached. Ugh. I had to start paying attention to my surroundings. Someone had been following me, while I followed Mr. Carthage.

Someday I'd learn, but that hadn't been tonight.

The arguing nearby was a quick reminder that someone had whacked me in the head. I reached back to touch my skull and found a wet mess. That explained the headache throbbing so hard it felt like my heart was in my brain.

I forced myself to take a deep breath and then another one. I had to get myself out of this trunk before I passed out again.

"We could have explained—why did you do that?" Mr. Carthage said.

Crud. They were just outside the trunk. I felt around for a weapon and hit a jug of something.

The one thing I loved about this dress was that it had pockets in the folds. Lucky for me, they hadn't noticed them. I turned on my phone's flashlight. There were no bars on it, so no phone service.

"Exactly how would you have explained that we were running off to the garage together?"

"I didn't agree to any of this," he said. "The murders—I'm not allowing my son to go down—you can't kill the doctor too."

"If you want to implicate yourself, that's fine by me. You're the only one she saw. I'm happy to leave her here with you. However, I'll be in the Maldives, which is one of the places I can't be extradited from."

He sighed. "What's your plan?" I turned on the recorder on my phone. If nothing else, maybe I could nab a confession before they killed me, and I hid

my phone in my pocket again.

“I’m going to drop her body off a bloody cliff.”

Great.

“No, I don’t care about the doctor. I mean, Caleb—I can’t let him go down for the murders. The plan was for your lover boy to go down for it, but you killed him.”

Again, he used the plural: *murders*. Who else had they killed?

Or did they plan to kill? Crud, Angie was still very much in danger.

Whatever was about to happen, I didn’t have much time.

The female voice was familiar, but I couldn’t quite place it. I rolled over with my phone. There was service! Finally!

First, I texted all my friends: 911 I’m in a trunk of a car. Look for Carthage. He’s here with a woman—in case I die before you get here.

Then I used the flashlight to see if I could find a weapon. Two bottles of antifreeze were in the back of the car, one of them half empty.

“I told you. He killed himself rather than murdering the bride-to-be. I’m surrounded by weak men.”

“I’m not weak,” Carthage growled. “And I don’t believe you. Why would he do that when he was all set to ruin everything?”

“He grew a bloody conscience,” she said. “I had him under control until he saw her that day. Idiot. He’s the one who ruined everything.” There was silence for a moment, then the woman continued. “I have this handled. Your son can’t go down for the crime. Any evidence they might have is circumstantial. They don’t have any evidence because it’s all going off a cliff with the doctor.”

Great.

Something rolled underneath me when I moved and poked into my ribs. I reached underneath and pulled out a crowbar.

My weapon.

I was about to pick it up when I noticed some plastic. I pulled it from the corner. The mallet, which was still inside the evidence bag. The mallet either she or he had hit Angie with at the party.

I very much disliked these two.

They’d done their best to ruin my friend’s wedding.

I used the light to find the trunk release. Though, I'd wait for them to leave before I used it.

Then there was an ominous click and the trunk lid opened. When Angie's stepmom leaned over, I clocked her between the eyes with the crowbar, and she stumbled back.

I yelled like a banshee, as I pulled myself to a sitting position.

I'd taken self-defense classes years ago, and everything I learned came back to me.

"You," the stepmom—the one currently married to Angie's dad—screamed, as she came toward me, and I swung the crowbar like a bat.

When I made contact, she stumbled again, this time falling to her knees.

"Get her," she screamed.

Mr. Carthage took a step forward, but I brandished the crowbar at him as I crawled out. I blinked, everything blurry in the dim light of the garage.

Do not pass out.

If these two had anything to do with it, I'd be right back where I started—only dead.

Stay focused.

"Why?" I grunted. It was the only word I could speak.

"I have no idea what you're talking about?" Mr. Carthage said.

"You do."

"I just found this woman about to kill you. I'm only here to help," he said calmly.

As much as I liked Damien, his dad was a piece of work.

"Heard you." Once my stiff legs were out of the car, I leaned against it. I didn't have a lot of strength left.

"You've been hit on the head by that woman and are delusional. No one will believe you."

"I'm going to kill you," the stepmom screeched as she launched herself at him.

He went down, as did she, and they skirmished on the cold garage floor. I probably should have tried to hit one of them really hard with the crowbar, but I was afraid if I stumbled from my perch, I might fall on top of them.

They rolled on the floor, batting at each other like small children fighting

on the playground.

“Stop,” I yelled.

Ewan and Henry came sliding in from the outer door.

I pointed to the couple on the floor. “They tried to kill me.”

That was all it took. Soon the pair were handcuffed and facing a wall. Abigail, Mara, and Jasper came rushing in; and right behind them, Angie and Damien.

“What happened?” They all ran toward me except for Damien. He stared at his father.

“What did you do,” he said angrily.

His father turned his head and huffed.

“She committed the murders,” I whispered. My throat hurt as if I’d swallowed glass. “He helped.”

Everyone gasped except for Abigail, who was busy examining the wound on the back of my head.

“Ouch,” I said as she pushed on the abrasion.

“Very little swelling, and the bleeding has already stopped.”

There was that.

“Get her out of here,” Ewan ordered.

“So, so bossy,” I whispered. “But I want to hear what they have to say. Even though I have their confession here.”

I took the phone out of my pocket.

Dara’s eyes widened, and then she lunged at Mr. Carthage. “Bloody idiot. You’re as stupid as that son of yours. I told you to check for a phone.”

“Father, what did you do?” Damien looked ready to pop. His face was red, and his body shook.

“I tried to protect you from yourself, son. As I always have.”

“What did you do?” Damien repeated. The words cut through the air like a dagger.

“Are you okay?” Angie whispered to me.

I nodded.

She moved to stand by her husband.

“Tell me. Now,” Damien said.

His father stared down at the floor.

“He didn’t want you to find out that Robbie was your half brother,” Dara said.

“Stupid woman,” Mr. Carthage hissed.

Damien took a step back. “*What?*”

“That’s right. Robbie had to have kidney surgery, but when they tried to find a match, there was a problem with the blood type. Your father promised him a kidney if he kept quiet and disrupted your wedding.”

Poor Damien turned gray, as did Angie. This was unexpected.

“Robbie and I were seeing each other, and he confessed everything to me. I’m the one who convinced him to blackmail your father.” Blood streamed from her face.

I’m a doctor, but that I’d hit her hard enough to make that happen gave me a sense of pride.

Dara was who Robbie had been seeing. Marianne said he’d been so happy, but he had to have known he was sleeping with Angie’s stepmom.

Maybe that was part of the thrill of revenge. A way to get back at the woman who’d broken his heart—for good reason.

If my friends hadn’t been holding me up, I might have fallen. Even leaning back on the car, my left knee gave out on me.

I’m not sure what I looked like, but with one glance, Ewan’s face turned an angry shade of red. “Crime scene, everyone out,” he ordered again.

“No,” Angie said sternly. “They tried to kill me. We deserve the truth.”

I tried to smile but it hurt.

“I want my lawyer,” Mr. Carthage said.

“Good luck finding a decent barrister,” Damien said. “As of this afternoon, I have Mom’s share of the company. I have controlling interests, and we will not be covering any of your legal fees. I’ve also instructed her to move all of your joint accounts into her name only.”

“You can’t do that.” Damien’s father blustered. “She can’t do anything without my signature.”

“No, father. She doesn’t need anything from you. The money was from her family, she put you on her accounts when you married, as a formality. Technically, she can do whatever she wants.

“I told her she needed to distance herself from you to save her family

name. The audit of our business accounts? That was me. I had to find out just how much you'd been embezzling.

"You would have been arrested right after the wedding. I didn't want to ruin my wife's special day with your dirty business."

He peered down at Angie. "I'm sorry, sweetheart."

She kissed his cheek. "I got you, babe," she said.

His father sagged in Henry's arms.

"Did you want to confess anything else?" Angie asked her stepmother. "I can't believe you wanted me dead."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Dara said. She batted her eyes at Ewan. "I'd like my barrister please. Until then, it's 'no comment.'"

Ewan appeared ready to throttle her, but he wasn't that sort of man.

"If no one else is confessing, I'd like to lie down," I said.

"Let's go," Ewan said as he jostled Dara out of the garage. Henry did the same with Mr. Carthage.

I'm not sure how Abigail, Jasper, and Mara made it to our room, half carrying me, but they did.

I must have passed out during the journey because I woke up with my back against the outside of the tub and my head back.

I opened my eyes to find Abigail rinsing my hair.

"Easiest way to get the blood out," she said.

"Did I pass out?"

"Yes. We need to get you to a hospital. There may be bruising on the brain."

"Angie too." I'd been wanting to get her into a scan for days, although she seemed fine.

"Yes," Angie said. She sat up on the counter with Mara and Jasper.

"Your party."

"It'll be going all night. Most of them are drunk enough they won't even know we're gone."

"We'll be heading out soon," Abigail said. "I thought I'd get you cleaned up and change your clothes so Ewan can have the ones you were wearing for evidence."

"Smart." Every word seemed an effort. "Concussion?"

“Eyes aren’t dilated. Did they force you to drink anything? You had something sweet smelling on your face.” As she said the words, her eyes went wide.

“Mara, finish rinsing her hair. I’m going to do a blood test and start an IV.”

I didn’t remember drinking anything, but that didn’t mean that horrible woman hadn’t poured it down my throat while I was passed out.

“I can’t believe Dara did all of this,” Angie said. “I thought she might be strong enough to straighten out my dad.”

“Confessed,” I said.

“So we heard,” Angie noted. She jumped off the counter and moved to the other side of me on the floor. “I’m so sorry they tried to kill you. I—” A tear slid down her cheek.

“Feel the same way about you,” I said weakly.

“If anything had happened to you, I would have never forgiven myself.”

“Wedding stories. You’ll have the best ones.”

Everyone around us hooted with laughter, even Angie.

“I hope some of those will not be repeated, if we can help it.”

I gave her a thumbs-up. I wasn’t sure why I kept doing that. I wasn’t really a thumbs-up kind of person. In fact, until that day, I’d never once made that gesture.

Abigail came back with test strips.

Angie helped Mara wrap my hair in a towel while Abigail pricked my finger.

“It’s our last one,” Abigail said as she put the test strip in the vial.

“Oh.”

“What?” Mara leaned toward me.

“Evidence in the trunk,” I managed to say.

“I’ll call Ewan and let him know,” Jasper said. “He’s been texting every two minutes to check on you.”

“Oh, here’s another one now: he says the helicopter is back and ready to take you to the hospital.”

“I’ll have to meet you there,” Abigail said. “I need to make sure Tommy is settled.” She sounded so worried.

“It’s fine. I’ll be fine.”

“I’m coming with,” Mara said. “Abigail, I promise to let you know everything the doctor says.”

“I’ll be there as well,” Jasper said. “We won’t let her be alone.”

Abigail blew out a breath. “Thank you. Tell them she tested positive for ethylene glycol. The good news is it looks like only trace amounts. But they’ll need to flush her system.”

“Can you text all that to us?” Mara asked. She and Jasper helped me off the floor. I was dressed in my robe and fuzzy boots.

“Can’t go like this.”

Mara snorted. “We’ll grab a coat for you on the way out.”

“No need,” Ewan slammed into the bathroom with a wheelchair, and another man followed him in.

“I’m Dr. Herbert,” he said.

Abigail started barraging him with information as they rolled me out to the helicopter pad.

The helicopter blades whirled loudly. “*Whoo-hoo.*”

“What did she say?” Ewan asked.

“No idea,” Jasper said.

“Em. Em?” Ewan sounded worried, but I no longer could stay awake.

Chapter Twenty-Three

After a two-day stay in the Edinburgh Hospital, I was fine. Only trace amounts of the ethylene glycol had made it into my system. More than likely, Dara or Mr. Carthage had tried to pour it down my throat while I'd been passed out.

They flushed my kidneys just in case. The doctors were more worried about my brain. I kept slipping in and out of consciousness. But part of that had to be from the exhaustion. We'd all been going nonstop for days.

Since this wasn't the first time I'd been conked on the head by a criminal, they'd had to observe me for concussion, but it had been completely unnecessary. My body recovered quickly.

I still had a headache, but considering what I'd gone through, it wasn't so bad.



By the time Mara, Jasper, and I made it home to Sea Isle, I'd never been so happy to see our little town.

The pub was open, and we dropped her off in front. "I'll bring you some lunch," she said. "Just let me take my bags up."

"I'll be okay," I said. "Don't worry."

"Nay, we won't be leaving you alone. Abigail and Tommy are right behind us. She said he needs to see you alive."

I smiled. Tommy was a good kid.

Jasper drove up the small hill to the five-hundred-year-old church where my home and office was.

"Home," I said.

“Can’t say I blame you for being happy about it. That was the most interesting wedding I’ve ever been to.”

I laughed, but it hurt. I tried to help him with the luggage, but he pushed me toward the door. “Just go on inside—I’ll be there in a minute.”

“Put the kits in my office,” I said. Abigail would have to replenish the kits, as we’d used most of our supplies.

Jasper took my other bag up the stairs to my bedroom. I couldn’t wait to crawl into my bed. I don’t care what anyone says, hospital beds are not comfortable.

When he came back down, he shivered.

“Is your heat on?”

“Yes,” I said.

“I’ll make a fire.” He set about putting the wood and kindling together, then lit a match. “I need coffee—do you?”

“Jasper?”

“Yes.”

“I’m fine. The doctors gave me the all-clear. You can go home.”

He snorted. “And have Abigail and Mara murder me in my sleep for failing with my friend duties? I think not.”

“Coffee sounds good. I like having you around, and you’re probably not wrong about our friends.”

I forced myself to follow him into the kitchen. While he made the coffee, I stood near the hob, which was what everyone here called a stove. The AGA was always on, and I spent a great deal of time in the kitchen.

Jasper opened the fridge.

“It’s—”

“Empty,” he said.

“Well, we were going to be gone,” I offered.

He shook his head.

The front door buzzed. Ewan had had one of his men install the buzzer, because I couldn’t always hear someone knocking if I was in my room.

I sat down at the table near the hob. Although the snow had stopped, the wind still whipped around the old church.

The weather here was harsher than I’d expected, but other than the

criminals I'd run into over the last few months, it was the only thing I didn't like about Scotland.

Mara came around the corner with two large paper bags.

"I brought some shepherd's pie, and Gran has been baking all morning. I have blueberry muffins, some brown bread, and some of grandad's roast."

Those were all my favorite pub foods. Well, I liked everything Mara and her gran made.

"Where is Jasper? I bet he's hungry."

"He's gone to get you some cream and milk. I think your empty fridge scared him."

I laughed. "Abigail usually keeps it full for us, but I told her not to bother this week since we'd be gone."

"I know that. You know that. But I think Jasper's worried you aren't looking after yourself very well."

"He's a good one."

"Aye. Ewan texted and asked about you." She nestled into what we called her corner of the couch.

"Oh?" He hadn't been around much. Not that I'd expected him to be.

"Did I mention he was there that first night at the hospital when you were sleeping so much?"

I frowned. "I don't remember that."

"You were out of it. He sent Jasper and me to the hotel down the way, to rest. I can't believe I forgot to tell you." She smiled.

"Why are you smiling?"

She shrugged. "I just thought you should know."

"I will admit to being surprised that half the town wasn't lined up outside with food when we arrived." That had also happened the last time I'd been laid up in the hospital.

"Ewan warned them off. Said if he heard anyone show up before you were rested, he'd fine them six hundred pounds."

My eyes flashed open. "What?"

"Aye. He told everyone to let you rest a few days before hounding you."

"I don't need him protecting me."

She cleared her throat. "Do you want most of the town at your doorstep

right now?”

“No,” I admitted.

“There you go.”

“Have you heard from Angie?”

“Aye. They’re postponing their honeymoon,” she said.

“Oh no. She was so looking forward to going to the Caribbean.”

“She says they can’t leave until the mess is sorted. Damien needs to show he’s in charge of the family business.”

“I feel sad for them. Not only do they have to miss their trip, but he’s also having to deal with a great deal of emotional fallout. Do you think it’s true Robbie was his half brother?”

“They took DNA, so I imagine we’ll know soon. By the way, Abigail handed over all the evidence, blood—everything—to the team in Edinburgh. Since they tried to kill you, Ewan didn’t want you or her to process the evidence. Everything must be by the book.” She said the last bit in a low Scottish brogue.

Frustrating, but understandable. “You sound like him.”

She laughed.

“Did he say anything else? Do they know who pushed the gargoyle?”

She shook her head. “It’s an—”

“Ongoing investigation,” I finished.

“But you’re the coroner—you’re entitled to know the truth. Give him a call.”

“Maybe later.”

We talked a little longer, but I must have fallen asleep mid-conversation.

When I woke up, Jasper snored softly in the big chair. Mara was asleep in her corner, and my coffee was cold. I checked my phone. It was two hours later, and I had a message from Ewan.

Stopped by, but you were resting. That’s all it said.

I really wanted to know about the case, but I had to clear the cobwebs from my brain.

I sipped the cold coffee.

Nope. I made some more.

My muscles hurt, and I had to keep moving. The bruising on my right leg

was better, but the dislocated knee still gave me trouble. That wasn't unusual, but it was annoying.

As the town doctor, I was on my feet all day.

My leather bag was on the kitchen seat where I'd been sitting earlier. While I waited for the coffee, I pulled out my tablet to go through the patient list for the next day.

I didn't care what Ewan said. I sent everyone an email that we would be open.

I read through their files and was well ensconced in my happy place, which was why I might have screamed a bit when someone banged on the back door.

Jasper and Mara came running into the kitchen.

"What is it?" Mara asked. They were looking all around the kitchen for a threat.

"Someone knocked," I said, as if that explained everything. After a quick peek through the peephole, I unlatched the door.

Ewan and Tommy came in and then slipped off their wellies in the back room we used as a mudroom.

"What's wrong?"

Ewan frowned. "Nothing. Tommy needed to see that you were all right. He wouldn't leave Abigail alone, so I promised to bring him down."

I smiled. "Tommy, I'm fine. Just a bump on the head."

"Hospitals. Bad," he said. It was understandable, after everything he'd gone through in his young life, why he might have an aversion.

"Everything is okay," I said.

"Movie night." Tommy showed me a DVD he held. It was an action film with The Rock. Who didn't like that guy?

"Is it the one with the big gorilla?"

"Cars," Tommy said. "We need snacks."

Mara, who was a bit disheveled, smiled. "Well, now that I know we aren't being murdered in our sleep, I'll get the snacks going. Where is Abigail?"

Ewan cleared his throat. "She and Henry forced the chemist to open this afternoon. She was worried about supplies for tomorrow."

He gave me a look.

“Why are you staring at me like that?”

“I told her not to worry because you would be taking a few days off. Then she told me about the email you sent out that the practice would be open tomorrow.”

I smirked. “The good people of Sea Isle need their doctor, and no one is going to tell me what to do.” I crossed my arms.

“Oh, I’m aware,” he said.

He glanced at the crowd in the kitchen. “I need to speak to the doc alone,” he said.

Mara made a face. “She’s just going to tell me whatever you say.”

Ewan just stared at her.

“Fine, but when Tommy gets upset because his popcorn isn’t ready, don’t blame me.” Mara huffed.

After they left, Ewan motioned for me to sit down at the table.

“Why do I have a feeling this isn’t going to be good news?”

“How are you feeling?”

I shrugged. “I’m okay—why?”

“I’ve filed attempted murder charges against Mr. Carthage.”

“What about Angie’s stepmom? I’m certain she was the mastermind behind everything that happened.”

“Aye, she is. We have a confession from her. She’ll be in prison the rest of her life. The murder weapons were in her car, and she made direct threats against you in the taped confession. We had her, and her barrister knew it.”

“Who pushed the gargoyles?”

“Mr. Carthage,” he said. “He also helped her put you in the trunk of the car and did not come to your aid.”

“How did she get Robbie to drink the poison? He had to have known.”

“It wasn’t in a water bottle. She masked it in a soda, which was sweet. We found the bottle in her car, along with the rest.”

“I need to know why she did all of this.”

Ewan stood up and helped himself to a cup of coffee. “Do you want one?”

“My cup is there on the counter.”

“Greed,” he said. “She wanted out of her marriage with Angie’s da, and she’d signed a prenup. If she divorced her husband, she received nothing. Mr. Carthage had offered to pay her a large sum of money if the wedding was called off.”

“She was going to knock Robbie out of the equation at some point. So, she wouldn’t have to share the money. But Robbie couldn’t go through with his part.”

“Yes. If she helped Mr. Carthage destroy the wedding, he’d give her half a million.”

“Money the motivator.”

“Aye. Robbie had threatened to tell everyone the truth, so she killed him. She did not plan to kill Angie, though. There, she’d drawn a line. She only allowed her to drink enough to make her sick.”

“Phew.”

“I know. Angie only drank a sip, but Mara chugged a bit before setting the bottle down.”

“When that plan didn’t work, Dara hit Angie on the head with the mallet. She took it upon herself to kill the bride, rather than just making her sick.”

“Yes. If you hadn’t been there doing the tests or helping Angie, then we would have had to wait for a hospital. If they got rid of you ...”

“I guess they don’t know about Abigail,” I said. “She would have kept our friends alive.”

“I’m glad we didn’t have to find out.”

“What will happen with Caleb?”

“He’s been released into rehab.”

“Technically, he didn’t do anything wrong, did he?”

“Yes, he did. When he didn’t come forward immediately with the information about Robbie.”

I scrunched up my face. “I feel like poor Damien has been through enough without his brother also going to jail.”

“The prosecutor hasn’t made a final decision yet. I believe he’s waiting to hear what the rehab facility has to say.”

“Hey, Tommy wants to start the movie. Are you coming?” Mara yelled.

“Are you staying?” I asked Ewan.

“For movie night?”

“Yes.”

“Aye. The Rock is one of my favorites.”

By the time we finished the snacks and settled down to watch the film, Abigail and Henry arrived with more food and boxes of meds. She stored them in our in-house pharmacy. Then she and Henry sat on either side of Tommy on the floor.

I glanced around at my little Sea Isle family.

This was what life was about. Being with the people you cared about and enjoying moments like this with them. I’d never had people love me so much or known that I could love them right back.

For so many years I’d put a steel box around my heart, determined to keep it safe, but these folks had changed that.

Five minutes into the film, Ewan’s head hit my shoulder. I started to shove him away, but he snored softly. The poor guy probably hadn’t slept in days.

I left him there.

Never in my life had I fit so squarely into a place. Sea Isle was my home.

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I don't know if anyone has ever thanked a country, but thank you, Scotland, for being such a wonderfully inspiring place. I will see you soon.

Also available by Lucy Connelly

The Scottish Isle Mysteries

An American in Scotland

Author Biography



Lucy Connelly travels around the world, usually with her bossy dog in tow. Her favorite pastime is sipping tea in a quaint cafe as she turns each passerby into a murder victim, witness, or suspect. If she stares at you strangely, don't worry. She only murdered you in her book.

This is a work of fiction. All of the names, characters, organizations, places and events portrayed in this novel are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to real or actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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