



ANNIE'S ATTIC MYSTERIES®

The Tapestry
in the Attic

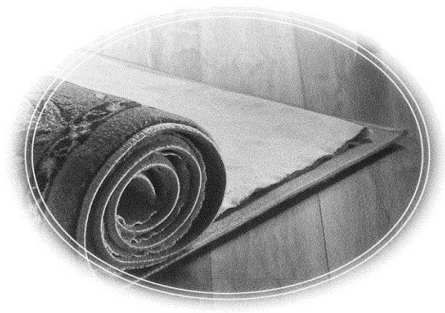


Mary O'Donnell



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The Tapestry in the Attic

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Dedication

To the cancer survivors in my family: my sister Becky and my father, Wm. David Martin, and to my Aunt Mary Anne.

Prologue

She seeketh wool, and flax, and
worketh willingly with her hands.—

Proverbs 31:13

Longfellow College

May 7, 1946

Dear Betsy,

I was very pleased and honored
to have received in the mail this
week the invitation to your
wedding. I would love to come and
be part of your special day, but
unfortunately, I will not be in Maine
on that date. I will be teaching a

course this summer at Berea College in Kentucky, and will not be back here until the new term starts at Longfellow this fall.

It has been a pleasure to have you in my classes, and though I understand why you will not be able to return, I hope you will continue to pursue your needlework, in whatever form that may be, and that the instruction you've received in the fiber arts will inspire you to continued excellence in the field. Appreciation for the artistic qualities of handmade articles is growing, even in this age of machines, and

you have a great deal to offer in both the design aspect and the execution of those designs. As a married woman, and I'm sure at some point in the future, a busy mother, always remember to take time to nurture yourself and your own talents. Your family will be all the better for it.

Perhaps when I return to Maine this fall, we will have a chance to get together in Stony Point. I appreciated the note you enclosed to tell me about your future plans. I would love to meet your new

husband and see the house the two of you are planning to buy. With a name like "Grey Gables," it sounds very grand!

I hope the small gift I have sent with this letter will provide a reminder of our friendship, and that as Mr. and Mrs. Charles Holden, you and your husband will have many happy years ahead. Please continue to write and let me know how you are doing.

Warm regards,
Lily Cornette

1

The landscape that met her eyes through the windows of Grey Gables was a combination of gleaming white and shades of gray. She knew the temperatures were frigid outside, but from where she stood, with her back to a crackling fire in the fireplace and a steaming mug of coffee cradled in her hands, Annie Dawson felt snug and safe, and most definitely warm. There was something about the Maine winter, with its short days and the need to

savor warmth with softer, thicker clothing and hearty meals that made her feel ... cozy. Yes, cozy was the word that most definitely described the ambience of the winter season for Annie.

That morning, as on most winter mornings, she had lit a fire in the living room fireplace to take off the chill. She wore a long flannel nightgown and bathrobe, and a pair of woolly slippers she had crocheted herself. Her breakfast had been a bowl of hot oatmeal mixed with a little brown sugar and topped with a few sprinkles of cinnamon and a

dollop of creamy yogurt. Now, from the shelter of the large Victorian-era house she had inherited from her grandmother, Elizabeth Holden, Annie surveyed the newest layer of snow that had settled and remained on everything except the dark expanse of the ocean and mused about what she would do that day.

She heard the antique wall clock in the kitchen strike ten. She told herself she'd really been particularly lazy that morning. With the sun rising well after seven o'clock in early January, it was sometimes

hard to motivate herself to get out of bed at her normal hour of six a.m., and the urge to savor the comforting atmosphere of Grey Gables on a winter morning was strong. In the winter, she told herself, there was no rush. The teenage boy whom she had employed to regularly clear her driveway of any new snowfall had already brushed the snow from her car, so when it came nearer time to leave for the weekly Tuesday morning meeting of the Hook and Needle Club, she would only have to start the car and let it warm up

for a few minutes before heading out. The Main Street shop, A Stitch in Time, where the meeting was held, was a short drive away in the best of weather, and though Annie liked to take her time in snowy conditions, it was still only a matter of minutes away. Stony Point, Maine, was not a large town.

Annie sighed deeply, thinking how good it was to be at home. It seemed so natural to call Grey Gables home now. When did she really begin to feel that the old house was really her own? She

couldn't remember an exact moment. Texas had been the place she had called home for most of her life. It was the place where she had gone to school, where she had met her late husband, Wayne, and where, together, they had built a business, bought a house, and had a child. And Texas was the place where their daughter, LeeAnn, son-in-law, Herb, and twin 7-year-old grandchildren, John and Joanna, remained.

As a young girl, Annie had only spent a few weeks of each summer vacation in Maine with her

grandparents, Charlie and Betsy Holden, or as she called them, "Gramps" and "Gram." She had always felt welcome at Grey Gables back then, but she always knew that her stay was temporary. Now it was different. She hadn't come to Stony Point with any intention of staying, but it had happened, somehow, that she had "put down roots," and now she felt like she was really part of the vibrant—and for the most part, friendly—coastal community.

She turned and looked around

the living room, taking in the few changes she had made to update its decor—a new coat of paint on the walls, some new pillows, and a few of her own knickknacks placed here and there. But she had kept most of her grandparents' furniture, and there were many familiar items she had retained, remembering them from the summers she had spent there as a girl. Near the window, in a little niche where it was protected from direct sunlight, hung a small tapestry that had been in the same spot as long as she could remember, so she had

left it there; it seemed the right thing to do.

The tapestry was woven primarily in shades of green and blue with highlights of golden and silvery threads. The top half was filled with a scene of a small rustic cabin in the woods. The cabin windows seemed to glow with warmth, and the front door was slightly ajar, as if the occupants were waiting expectantly for visitors to arrive. The ground between the closely grouped evergreen trees that surrounded the cabin was

populated with wisps of ferns and hints of low-lying wildflowers.

Below this idyllic setting was a poem called A Home Song by Henry Van Dyke. The letters were made with silky black thread and highlighted with the same silvery thread that illuminated the scene above. Annie recalled reading the poem many times as a girl, and she knew it by heart. She read the final words to herself once again: " ... marble floors and gilded walls, Can never make a home. But every house where Love abides, and Friendship is a guest, Is surely

home and home-sweet-home: For there the heart can rest." She smiled as she remembered that she had often recalled those words when she and Wayne were first married and living in a tiny apartment. They had had so little back then, but they were so happy.

She focused on the tapestry again, looking at what she always had thought was the intriguing part when she was a little girl. Across the bottom edge was a narrow rectangular panel with small, roman-font letters across the center

of it—L.C.~MCMXLVI~L.C. Surrounding the letters were green vines interspersed with white lilies. She had wondered what the letters meant back then, but eventually, she did figure out that MCMXLVI weren't just random letters, but that they were Roman numerals that signified a year—1946 to be precise. Though the letters L and C could also be used as Roman numerals, because of the periods she had thought that "L.C." might be the weaver's initials, though she wasn't sure why they were given twice. She had never asked Gram

about it—she'd preferred the mystery of it—and now it was too late to find out if Gram knew who or what "L.C." meant.

She was startled out of her thoughts by a sudden movement just below her field of vision. She laughed. It was only Boots, her ever-present companion around the house—a gray cat with white feet—hence the name "Boots"—who had just leapt up to stand on the wide ledge of the windowsill. Annie stretched out her hand to softly stroke the appreciative cat's head

and back. Boots responded with an output of loud purring, arching her back to meet the light pressure of Annie's hand and walking back and forth in front of the window.

Looking up again, through the window she saw her best friend and neighbor, Alice MacFarlane, blazing a trail through the more-than-knee-deep snow in a direct path from her home—the old carriage house—to Grey Gables. The carriage house had been a part of the original parcel of property of Grey Gables, built in the days before there were automobiles. It had been sold

separately many years ago, and eventually was converted into a quaint little house that Alice now rented.

Annie was grateful to have her dearest friend just a short walk away. Now she chuckled softly. It was just like Alice to make her own path instead of taking the easy route through the plowed street and the shoveled driveway. She was covered from head to toe in stocking hat, scarf, coat, mittens, and boots, with only the small oval of her face around her eyes visible.

She was looking down at the snow, taking high, exaggerated steps with great effort. Over her shoulder she had slung the strap of a large cloth tote bag, which Annie recognized as Alice's project bag—it held her in-progress embroidery work. In her hands she held aloft a colorful round tin.

Annie watched until Alice was nearer and then went to open the front door to welcome her friend into the warmth of the main hall that ran through the center length of Grey Gables. The outside of the wooden front door was covered

with ice crystals that sparkled in the sunlight that streamed over the landscape with increasing intensity.

“Hellooo, Nanook of the North!” Annie shouted, her breath billowing out in clouds of white mist in the cold air.

Alice was still maneuvering through the deep snow, and her head snapped up midstep at the sound of Annie’s voice. She nearly fell over. As she struggled to maintain her balance, Annie tried hard to hide her amusement, but her friend was not deceived. At last,

Alice made it to the cleared walkway and up the front steps and onto the porch.

Without ceremony, she handed the tin and her project bag to Annie. "Here—hold these," she said, her voice muffled from the scarf that was still wrapped around her mouth. She tried to brush the snow from the lower part of her coat and pant legs, and was able to get most of it off, but a fine layer clung to her clothing. She stomped her feet to shake the snow off her boots, and then she reached up to push her scarf below her chin, revealing a

rosy nose and cheeks. "That was deeper than I thought it was going to be," she said, still trying to catch her breath. "You were absolutely no help. Don't you know better than to distract a girl when she's on a mission?" Her tone was scolding, but her blue eyes were twinkling.

"Come on inside before we both freeze, you silly girl. Why didn't you come around by the street?" asked Annie.

"I told you—I'm on a mission," replied Alice as she stepped inside and proceeded to slip out of her

snow boots. She pulled off her hat and shook her head to release her long, voluminous auburn tresses from their confinement as she continued to speak. "I prefer to take the most direct route when I have a mission."

"And what is your mission this morning?" asked Annie. She shivered a bit from the cold air and firmly closed the front door.

"I had a phone call from Peggy this morning, and there's doin's afoot," said Alice.

Peggy Carson was a fellow member of the Hook and Needle

Club whose specialty was quilting. She was often the source of news for anything that was happening in Stony Point. She worked as a waitress at the downtown diner, The Cup & Saucer, and really had a way with people. Her husband, Wally, was self-employed, being knowledgeable in all forms of plumbing, electrical, and general construction work; he was also a talented woodworker. He often worked for Annie, helping her to give Grey Gables a much-needed facelift inside and out. Along with

their seven-year-old daughter, Emily, the Carson family had become good friends of Annie's.

"Doin's? Is that some sort of Maine slang that I don't know about?" asked Annie.

"You've heard of doin's before, surely," said Alice. "You know—doin's—things—stuff. There's stuff afoot."

"You mean like 'the game's afoot,' as Sherlock Holmes would say?" asked Annie.

"Well, I don't know if it has anything to do with a mystery, though we both know that would be

right up your alley. Peggy just called to make sure we were both going to be at A Stitch in Time today. She said Stella's up to something and is going to make some sort of announcement at the meeting."

Stella Brickson was the elder member of the Hook and Needle Club. She was feisty for a woman in her early eighties—Annie wasn't entirely sure of her exact age. It seemed to be a touchy subject for Stella, and Annie wasn't about to ask! Stella was a wealthy widow

who had grown up in Stony Point, but had moved to New York City as a young woman. After her husband died, seven years earlier, she had returned and had taken up the task of creating what had been dubbed the "Cultural Center" for the area that included a museum and a small theater. Stella was sure of her opinions and had no problem speaking her mind; that confidence, along with her strength of character, was an asset when it came to getting things done. However, sometimes she could be a bit stubborn when it came to

anything, or anyone, that was somehow “new” to the area. When Annie had first arrived in Stony Point and was invited by Mary Beth Brock, the owner of A Stitch in Time, to join the Hook and Needle Club, Stella had been against it, but that little mystery had been worked out, and now, it seemed as if she and Stella had always been friends.

“An announcement by Stella ... that should be interesting,” said Annie. “I plan to be at the meeting. I’m just a little slow getting myself together this morning.”

Alice looked over Annie's attire and nodded in agreement. "I guess you are. Kind of unusual for you to be still in your nightgown at this time of the morning, isn't it? Are you feeling OK?"

Annie laughed. "Yes, I'm fine; just being a little lazy. I got up a little later than usual, and after breakfast, I was enjoying the view through the window in the living room. It feels so cozy in here this morning. Part of me just wants to curl up with a good book and stay like this all day."

"Well, you'll have to do that

another day. When we get a real snow, and you can't get out, that's the kind of day you can laze around in your jammies all day," said Alice.

"So this isn't a 'real' snow?" asked Annie.

"This? Are you kidding? I thought you knew that by now. Wait 'til you wake up one morning with the snow blowing and the wind howling, piling several feet of snow against your doors and windows. Now, that's a real snow." Alice paused and changed the subject. "Aren't you curious about what's in

the tin?"

"I'm assuming it's one of your fabulous baked creations."

"It is that, indeed," said Alice. "And if you'll let me have a cup of your coffee, I'll share some with you, and I'll tell you the rest of Peggy's message."

"That's a good plan, but this was my last cup of coffee," said Annie, indicating the empty mug she was holding. "If you make another pot, maybe decaf this time, I'll go upstairs and get changed, and then you can fill me in."

"Deal," said Alice.

Twenty minutes later, Annie was back downstairs after a quick shower and change into a warm, taupe-color turtleneck sweater and a pair of dark brown wool-blend slacks. She ran her fingers through her damp, shoulder-length blond hair to help dry it out and fluff it up. She had kept her makeup to a minimum as usual, so it only took her a couple of minutes to “put on her face.”

While Annie was in the shower, Alice had started a pot of coffee and had set the kitchen table with

Annie's grandmother's best Aster Blue china dessert plates, and matching cups and saucers, along with white linen napkins and antique silverware from the sideboard in the dining room. Sitting on a paper doily on one of Annie's fancy serving plates was a round, tube-shaped chestnut-brown cake topped with pecans laid out like flower petals; each "flower" had half a red cherry in the center.

It was a scene that looked like something out of a Martha Stewart Living magazine that greeted Annie when she entered Grey Gables's

kitchen. She wasn't surprised. Alice made her living by conducting home parties for Divine Décor, a home-decor company, and Princessa, a jewelry company. She had a knack for knowing just how to decorate a room or a person, to show them off at their best.

"This looks lovely, Alice. Is that a fruitcake?" asked Annie.

"Yes," answered Alice. "I meant to have it ready for Christmas, but I didn't get started soon enough since it takes four to five weeks to age. I made several. After they

were baked, I brushed each one with a vanilla syrup I made that included a drop or two of brandy extract, and then wrapped them and put them away in my little pantry to age."

"Well, it looks like a work of art," said Annie.

"Wait 'til you taste it," said Alice.

The two friends settled down to cake and coffee, and after Annie had raved about the flavor of the fruitcake, she got down to the business of Alice's "mission."

"So, what news has Peggy been spreading throughout Stony Point

this morning?" Annie asked.

Alice grinned. Everyone loved Peggy, but they all knew that if you wanted to keep something a secret, she was not the person to tell. "She said that she and Emily were at the Cultural Center for a dance rehearsal last evening. The students from Myra's School of Dance are going to give a performance next week in the theater, by the way, and Peggy said she was going to invite the Hook and Needle Club to come to see Emily perform with her class.

Anyway, as I was saying, they were at the Cultural Center, and apparently Stella was there with some man—Peggy said he looked like a cross between Colonel Sanders and that actor that played Santa Claus in Miracle on 34th Street.”

“The newer movie or the old one from the forties?” asked Annie.

“I don’t know—she didn’t specify,” said Alice. “It doesn’t matter. I just imagined a portly older gentleman with white hair and a beard. Peggy said that Stella didn’t notice that she and Emily

were there at first, but when she realized Peggy had seen her talking to that man, Peggy thought that Stella seemed sort of embarrassed—she actually blushed. At least that's what Peggy said. Then Stella excused herself from the gentleman and walked over to speak to Peggy. She would only say that she'd see her at the Hook and Needle Club meeting, and that she wanted to talk to all the members about something important, but she wouldn't say what it was."

"Sounds a bit mysterious," said

Annie. "She had to know that something as cryptic as that was bound to set off all kinds of warning bells in Peggy."

"Do you think she's got herself a boyfriend?" asked Alice, with a mischievous look in her eyes.

"I don't think so," Annie said with a smile. "Can you really see Stella making that sort of announcement at the Hook and Needle Club meeting?"

Alice laughed out loud at the thought. "No, you're right. She'd never do that in a million years. I guess the best thing to do is to just

go to the meeting and find out what's going on. Do you mind if I ride over with you today?"

"Not at all. Let's just clear up these dishes first and then we can head on out," said Annie. "I'm curious to find out what Stella could have to tell us that's so important, and what, if anything, her gentleman friend has to do with it."

2

At one minute to eleven, Annie and Alice walked through the door and into the warmth of A Stitch in Time. It seemed to Annie that the shop catered to every sort of needlecrafter imaginable. Besides all kinds of threads, yarns, and fabrics, the shop contained the tools and patterns needed to turn those basic materials into useful and beautiful treasures. Annie was a crocheter herself, but she had been known to dabble in some of

the other varieties of needlework. It was so nice to have a local shop she could rummage through to her heart's content, and where she could get all the materials she needed for her current project and inspiration for future ones.

The shop assistant, Kate Stevens, greeted them with a smile from behind the wooden counter where the cash register sat. Kate not only worked in the shop, but was a designer of crochet fashions. That day she was wearing a red shawl over a plain black sweater. The shawl, secured at one side with an

antique silver brooch, was looped around her shoulders, its long fringy ends hanging down over one arm. The red color of the shawl set off Kate's shoulder-length dark hair and dark eyes. Annie thought the shawl had all the attributes of one of Kate's own creations—the design, the workmanship, and the color choice combined to make a beautiful accessory. Kate's finished projects were often displayed in the shop and were usually snapped up by the patrons of A Stitch in Time. She had recently won a prestigious

award for one of her designs at a needlecraft convention in Texas and had begun to sell her designs to a publisher. As a divorced mom with a teenage daughter, the extra money was most welcome.

Annie shifted her gaze over to the circle of comfy upholstered chairs where the Hook and Needle Club meeting was held each week. Stella was in her regular place, sitting straight as an arrow, her knitting needles clicking rhythmically as she cranked out a stream of identical stitches. Across from her sat Gwendolyn Palmer.

Gwen's husband was the president of Stony Point Bank, and she was active as a volunteer on all sorts of committees—for the town of Stony Point, at church, and with several charitable organizations. She was a knitter like Stella, but her work style tended to be a little less regimented.

Both ladies were typically beautifully dressed and coiffed, no matter if the event was large and public, or small and private like the needle club meeting, but again each woman had her own style.

Gwen, though slightly older than Annie, had her blond hair layered in the most current style to best accent its natural wave. Stella kept her gray hair in an updo, and the style was normally no-nonsense. Sometimes it looked quite severe, reminding Annie of an old-maid schoolmarm of the olden days, but today, Annie had to admit, Stella's hair seemed softer and wavier, with a pretty gold clasp holding it in place at the back of the crown of her head. She also seemed to be wearing more makeup than usual. Her cheeks were rosier and ... Annie

tried to pinpoint what else was different. She gave Alice a questioning sidelong glance, and then, as if Alice were reading Annie's mind, Alice silently mouthed the word "mascara." Annie looked at Stella again—that was it; Stella was actually wearing mascara. She never did that. Maybe Alice was right, thought Annie. Maybe Stella does have a boyfriend.

Annie and Alice had just taken their seats when Peggy breezed in through the door carrying her project bag, her coat unbuttoned,

her face flushed, and her dark curly hair whipped up by the wind. The Cup & Saucer, the diner where she worked, was just next door, and each week on Tuesday she took her lunch break at eleven so she could attend the Hook and Needle Club meeting. She plopped down in one of the chairs in the circle, and as usual, kicked off her shoes. "Have I missed anything?" she asked expectantly, looking at Stella.

Stella smiled at Peggy and said, "No, you haven't missed anything. I wouldn't dream of beginning until you were here. Now we just have to

wait for Mary Beth. Where is she, Kate?"

"She had a doctor's appointment this morning," replied Kate. Indicating the shop's glass door with the tilt of her head, she continued, "She ought to be walking through that door any moment now."

As if conjured by magic, Mary Beth suddenly appeared at the door, and she pulled it open to enter the store. "Sorry to keep you waiting, ladies," she said as she headed toward the back room. "Just

let me stash my coat and purse, and I'll be right with you."

Mary Beth returned, her short salt-and-pepper hair combed, but rather flat from the hat she had been wearing. The shop was quiet as she and Kate joined the other ladies in the circle, each carrying a small crochet project to work on. As Annie observed Mary Beth, she had the impression that all was not well. Mary Beth kept her brown eyes lowered, and instead of bursting into conversation as usual, all that she said was, "OK, Stella, the floor is yours, as requested."

Stella didn't seem to notice that Mary Beth was subdued and began, "I'm sure you all know that I have something important to discuss with you today." She looked pointedly at Peggy, but with affection. Peggy smiled back, content in knowing that she had spread the word.

Stella continued, "It has been our practice in this group to use our individual talents to help others—whether by making hats and blankets for preemies at the hospital, or by pitching in to help at the yearly auction to benefit the

community center, or whatever task is set before us. I'm going to ask that each of you step up once again, and perhaps stretch your abilities in new ways. In December, at the monthly board meeting of the Cultural Center, a young playwright by the name of Jacob Martin, who has had some success in Los Angeles, and who was born and raised in Stony Point, presented us with a proposal: He has written a play he would like us to premiere here, in the Cultural Center's theater."

"Why here?" asked Alice. "If he's

doing so well in L.A., why would he want to come back to our little town?"

"I'm getting to that," said Stella. "Early last year, Jacob's wife died from breast cancer. He wants the proceeds from the performances of his play to go toward breast cancer research. He and his wife met as students at Longfellow College, which, as most of you know, is located not far from Stony Point. He approached his former professor, Rudyard Howell, to direct the play, and also asked him to enlist some

of his students who are theater majors. Professor Howell has graciously accepted, and his students will be providing most of the actors and stage people needed, but it's not enough. We need to include as many locals as are willing to help with things like advertising, providing stage props and costumes, and so on. I'm asking you all to help. Even if you have never worked behind the scenes at a theater, I believe you all have talents that can be used with great effect to make this, our first local production, a success."

"Is Professor Howell the man I saw you with at the theater last evening?" Peggy asked.

"Yes, Peggy. I was showing him around our facility, and I think I can say with confidence that he was impressed with what we have done to build and equip our little theater." It was a massive undertaking for a town the size of Stony Point, but I think it will prove to be a worthwhile effort with all the opportunities it will provide to bring a bit of culture to our area, not to mention the collateral

activity it has brought to businesses in this area."

The renovation of the large Main Street structure that was known as the Walker Building for use as the Cultural Center had been in progress when Annie came to Stony Point from Texas, and the main-floor museum had opened not long after she arrived. It had also been decided that a theater would be an asset for educational lectures, travelogues, and for live performances both musical and dramatic. Stella had taken on the task of forming a committee

specifically to raise money for the project, and had seen to the planning and construction of the community theater that had taken up the second and third floors of the building. The theater had been completed only a few months earlier.

The committee decided that in order for all the local people to have a chance to see what the theater was like, they would show a different classic film one or two weekends each month at the cost of only a dollar per person. The

theater had already shown several films including Mrs. Miniver from the 1940s and the silent-era movie The King of Kings. They were committed to only providing entertainment that was suitable for the entire family. The theater had also hosted a live performance by a touring dance company which had been a big hit, drawing in many residents from surrounding communities.

“In addition to the student actors from the college,” Stella continued, “I’ve also asked some old friends of mine who are retired actors—Dolores and Cyril Fortescue—to

come to star in the play. Dolores and Cyril are living just north of Stony Point in a little cottage they used as a getaway place when they were performers in the theater. They worked for many years in New York City, which is where I came to know them. They have replied that they would be glad to participate, especially for such a good cause. Their lives have not been untouched by the tragedy of breast cancer."

Gwen said, "It's unfortunate, but I think it would be difficult to find

someone who doesn't have a family member—or at least know of some friend—who has been affected by it. I think this sounds like a wonderful opportunity to do some good. I'll help in any way that I can. I think John and I can probably help round up some sponsors, and I'd be happy to see what I can do about getting the word out for people who might like to be involved. I have contacts at a print concern in Portland that I'm sure could give us a good quote for printing playbills—posters and programs. I can check that out, if you like."

“Thank you, Gwen,” said Stella. “That’s just the sort of spirit I was hoping for. I think if we all pitch in and encourage our friends and neighbors who can spare the time to participate, we can make this a really special event that will be of great benefit, even beyond the confines of our little community.”

All eyes were on Stella, except Annie’s and Mary Beth’s. Annie had chosen that moment to look over at Mary Beth. Her head was bowed low, as if she was closely examining the crochet work she was holding in

her hands, and Annie could see that her mouth was held in a grim line. Annie was concerned. The project that Stella was describing was normally just the sort of thing that Mary Beth loved—she was always in favor of doing all she could to help others. There had to be something else that was on her mind that was preventing her from showing her normal enthusiasm.

Stella continued to speak, "Trent Bodkin has been our projectionist and our light and sound technician since we opened the theater. He'll continue to be in charge of that,

and he'll have a couple of students to help him. However, since this is our first production, we haven't yet built up a repertoire of things to draw from for costumes or for scenes and props. Scenery design is very important, but having someone who can build it for us is just as important. That's why the board has agreed that we need to budget for a skilled full-time person to build anything that is called for by the script and the director. Stella looked at Peggy and said, "We hoped that Wally would be

available to take on the job, Peggy. I know you had said last week that he will soon be finishing up some indoor work for Mrs. Watkins; if he can take on the job, we'd like to contract him for at least two months' work. Of course, he'll have some students and volunteers to help him as well, but he'll be in charge, and the bulk of the work will fall to him."

Annie had noticed that as Stella spoke, Peggy's face clearly showed her emotions on the prospect of being part of a theatrical production—her smile was broad, and her

eyes conveyed her excitement. Now she was unable to contain her zeal any longer. "Oh, Stella! This is so wonderful! And I know that Wally is available, or at least he will be by the end of this month when he finishes up that job for Mrs. Watkins. The winter months are often a little slow for him. This will be just the thing! Thank you for thinking of him!"

"He was the first person who came to mind," Stella said. "He really is the perfect man for the job. We know he has the skills, and he

has a reputation for doing excellent work. If you would ask him to stop by the Cultural Center office tomorrow, we can work out the details."

"Certainly! And I'll be happy to help as much as I can," said Peggy. "Emily and I just love being in the theater. With all her dance rehearsals, we've spent several evenings there. And by the way, I meant to invite all of you to her dance recital next week. I hope you can come. All the little girls just look adorable in their outfits, and the older girls have a great number

they're going to do for the finale."

As the ladies confirmed their intentions to be in the audience for Emily's performance, Stella looked around at the other members of the Hook and Needle Club, her eyes pausing momentarily on Mary Beth who was still keeping her head down and seemingly concentrating on her crochet work. "So, I know that Gwen and Peggy are in favor of this project. Now, I'd like to hear what the rest of you think."

"I'm in," said Alice. "I don't really know what I can contribute, but it

sounds like fun, and it's definitely for a good cause."

"Knowing what an eye for decorating you have," said Stella, "I hope that you can put that talent to use on our set design."

"Well, you know that I love to decorate, but I'm not sure what all 'set design' would entail," said Alice.

"An important thing for everyone to remember," said Stella, "is that Professor Howell is more than just our director; it's his everyday job to teach students all the different aspects of theater production, so he

knows how to communicate his ideas, and he'll let us know how they should be carried out, though I don't doubt that it will require some homework on our part."

Annie smiled and said, "That's good to know. I don't mind a little homework. I'd like to help too, though I don't have much experience with theater either. I was part of the chorus in a musical when I was a senior in high school, but that's all."

Stella looked directly at Annie. "You, my dear, have a talent for

detail. You notice things that others don't. And you're an avid reader, so you're good with words. I've suggested to Professor Howell that you would be a good person to help the actors run through their lines, and to act as a prompter if and when they forget their lines. I hope that's all right with you."

"That sounds like a lot of fun actually," said Annie.

Kate spoke up. "I'm in too. And I'm sure that Vanessa will want to be a part of it." She paused a second and then added, "It's kind of odd. I think I might know Jacob

Martin. There was a guy in my class in high school by that name. He was really shy and quiet. It's hard to believe he ended up in such a public career as the theater."

"It's my understanding that his wife was instrumental in his career choice," said Stella. "From what he said when he presented his idea to us at the board meeting, she was the one who believed in his writing talent, and she convinced him that he could write plays. She encouraged him to become a theater major in college."

Stella paused and looked at Mary Beth. Quietly she said, "What do you think about the Hook and Needle Club acting as a support team for the play, Mary Beth?"

Mary Beth looked up, and there were tears in her eyes. She looked around at the others, with an apologetic expression on her face. "I'm sorry. It's a wonderful idea, and of course, I want to take part in it as well."

"What is it, Mary Beth?" asked Peggy. "Was it something we said?"

Mary Beth smiled slightly, but her eyes were sad as a small tear rolled

down her cheek. "No, Peggy, not at all. I just ... what a strange coincidence ... I was in to the doctor's office this morning for my annual checkup, and I was due for a mammogram. The thing is, they found a lump in my left breast, and they've scheduled me for a biopsy this Friday."

The room was silent for a moment before it erupted with words of surprise and support, and offerings of prayers from her friends.

"Thanks ... to all of you," said

Mary Beth, taking a tissue from her pocket to wipe the few tears that had fallen on her cheeks. "I had thought that I would just keep it to myself until after the biopsy results came back, but it turns out that I do need the support of my friends. All of you have become like family to me; sometimes as much or even more than my own. I feel like I truly have six sisters here in Stony Point."

"I'm so glad that you told us, Mary Beth," Annie said. "You don't need to go through this alone. We're all here for you."

"I know that, and I appreciate it," said Mary Beth. "I guess I haven't had a chance to process it all yet. It was just such a shock. I'm so healthy. I try to eat right, and I exercise. I'm a little overweight, but my blood pressure and heart rate are good. I guess I'm feeling what most people in my position must feel: 'Why me?'"

"The thing to do, I think," said Gwen, "is to just take one step at a time. Having the right attitude is so important. Try not to imagine the worst. You don't even know yet if

it's actually cancer. Sometimes it isn't. If it is, discovering it early like this is the key." She glanced around the room. "And that's why it's wise for all of us to have routine checkups."

"And if and when you need some time off, I can handle things here at the shop," said Kate. "You know that Vanessa will be happy to stop by after school to help out too."

"My days are pretty much free," said Annie. "I'd love nothing more than to volunteer in the shop during the day, so Kate can take a break."

"I'd like to volunteer too," said

Gwen. "Annie and I could take turns."

Mary Beth's somber expression turned into a grateful one.

"If you had said something when you came in, this whole thing about the play could have waited," said Stella. "I hope you know that I'm here for you too."

"I do know that, Stella," said Mary Beth. "But please don't put off the play on my account. This just makes it all the more personal for us as a group. Please go ahead with your plans. No matter how my test

turns out, I think it's important for us to do this. Every single day, many people get this same sort of news. If we can make even a little difference by contributing something to prevent this disease now or to cure it in the future, it's all for the better."

3

With Mary Beth's blessing, Stella continued to talk about the play and what the group could do to help. She had been confident that all the members of the Hook and Needle Club would be willing to participate, and she had already arranged for them to meet the playwright, Jacob Martin, and the director, Professor Howell, in the Cultural Center conference room the following Saturday. She had scheduled the meeting in the late

afternoon so that Kate could attend after she closed up A Stitch in Time.

After Stella confirmed that they would all be available, with the possible exception of Mary Beth since they weren't sure how she would be feeling the day after her biopsy, she reached into a leather satchel at the side of her chair and pulled out a stack of bound papers. Passing the stack to her right, Stella said, "These are copies of the play. Take one and pass it on. I'd like you to read it by Saturday, before we meet with Jacob and Professor Howell. Also, tucked inside each

one is a copy of a basic list of props that Professor Howell wrote up. As you read the play, if there is anything you notice that isn't on the list, please add it and bring it to our attention at the meeting on Saturday."

As Stella spoke, Annie glanced at the title page on the cover of her copy of the play. The last line caught her by surprise; the page read:

A mystery play in two acts:

King Lemuel's Treasure

By Jacob Martin

in loving memory of his wife and
best friend,

Ophelia Fortescue-Martin

Fortescue? thought Annie. Wasn't that the name of Stella's actor friends?

Stella continued to speak: "As you can see from the title page, it's a mystery play."

"So, it's like Murder She Wrote, or NCIS?" asked Peggy.

"No," answered Stella. "This is quite different. 'Mystery play' is a term used in the Middle Ages for plays that were presented at church festivals in England. The plays

depicted events from the Bible, like the Creation, the Fall of Man, and the Flood from the Old Testament, and the Incarnation, and the Crucifixion from the New Testament. In this case, "mystery" refers to divine action in the course of human history. For a population that was largely illiterate, it was a good way to teach them about the Bible."

"I don't remember any Bible story about a King Lemuel," said Peggy.

"He is an obscure person from the Bible, mentioned only once or

twice, I believe, but if I were to tell you the play has to do with the Proverbs 31 woman, I'd wager you are all familiar with her," said Stella.

"You mean the woman whose 'price is far above rubies'?" asked Gwen. She didn't wait for an answer, but laughed and said, "I remember reading an article in a magazine a few years ago titled 'Why I Hate the Proverbs 31 Woman.' The writer didn't really 'hate' her, she just enumerated the reasons why reading about that paragon of womanhood made her

feel like she could never succeed at living up to that ideal 'virtuous woman.'"

"She is intimidating," agreed Alice. "I reread those verses only a couple of months ago. She does just about everything—she gets up in the middle of the night to start preparing food so she can feed her household and the poor; she weaves cloth and sells it, and she makes all of her family's clothing and her own; she buys land and plants fruit trees on it—or maybe it was a vineyard—I can't remember.

Anyway, the point is that she produces everything that is needed for her household, from scratch no less, and as I recall, she also manages the household finances. And on top of everything else, every word that comes out of her mouth is kind and wise. Talk about multitasking! How could any woman live up to all of that?"

All the ladies smiled at Alice's description, and Gwen said, "Well, I guess we would all do whatever we had to, if we lived in that time, to care for our families."

"The point isn't so much about

what she is doing,” said Stella, “but it’s the underlying principle—the reason why she is to be praised is because she ‘fears the Lord.’ That is, she respects His Word and takes seriously the responsibilities that are laid upon her as a wife and mother. When you read the play, I think you’ll see that this is its focus.”

Indicating the title page, Annie said to Stella, “I noticed Jacob’s wife’s maiden name was Fortescue—is she related to your friends?”

Stella’s expression changed.

"Yes. Ophelia was their daughter. They've had a difficult time dealing with her death, as you can imagine. I hope being part of this production will help mend some of those wounds, not just for themselves but for their relationship with their son-in-law."

"Were there hard feelings between them?" asked Kate.

Stella shook her head. "I've said too much. It's not our business. Our business is to make King Lemuel's Treasure the best production we possibly can." Stella paused and seemed to draw herself up even

straighter. "Let's get back to it. If you turn to page two, you'll see the cast list—there are eight characters who have speaking parts—and then we'll also need a small number of extras for the king's court and a few of his subjects; the characters are described in more detail as they enter the plot, so you will see those descriptions in italics as you read through. Below the cast list is a short synopsis of the scenes, and then on the next few pages, Jacob gives a detailed description of the stage setting, including the location

of doors and windows, and the placement of furniture and other props. Most of the play takes place in the great hall of the king's castle. Because this play is based on a type of play from medieval times, you will see that Jacob has described the setting and the costumes in terms of that era rather than the time of King Solomon, the writer of Proverbs. So, our set and costumes will need to reflect a late-medieval sensibility rather than Biblical times." Looking at Kate, she said, "I was hoping we could put your clothing design talent to good

use for the costumes, Kate."

"That would be so much fun!" said Kate. "I can go to the library and check out some books on costumes, and I know I can get Vanessa to find resources on the Internet too. I thought this winter would be kind of quiet, but it looks like we are all going to be kept pretty busy."

"Don't forget that there will also be students from the college working with us. Don't be afraid to delegate. If this effort is to succeed, it needs to be a true collaborative

effort between the students of Longfellow College and the citizens of Stony Point. I'm sure we are all going to learn a lot from this experience," said Stella.

Annie pulled out the list of props Professor Howell had written up and scanned through it. Included in the list was a large patterned rug. She knew that there were several large area rugs rolled up in the attic at Grey Gables. Perhaps one of them would work. There were several other items she thought she could provide, including a standing embroidery frame, which she knew

she had since her grandmother had been a professional designer of embroidery and cross-stitch patterns. Also on the list was an entry for “baskets of various shapes and sizes”—there were dozens of those in the attic.

“If anyone is interested and can come over to Grey Gables one evening—either tomorrow or Thursday—we could go through the attic to see if there is anything that we can use for the stage set. From this list, I can see right off that I have at least a couple of things that

might work, and maybe more," said Annie.

"Sounds like a good place to start," said Alice. "I can come either evening."

"Emily has rehearsal on Thursday evening—could we meet at Grey Gables tomorrow instead, after dinnertime?" asked Peggy.

Everyone agreed to come over to Annie's house the following evening to look through the attic for props for the play, except for Stella, who said, "I'll leave that to you girls. I don't do so well with stairs as I used to. I want to say again how

much I appreciate your willingness to pitch in. Kate's right—it's going to be a busy winter, and the sooner we can get our ducks in a row, the better it will be."

Annie planned to spend the next morning reading the play, but before she began, she opened her Bible to Proverbs 31 to refresh her memory. There he was: King Lemuel. Annie had forgotten the first part of the chapter, where King Lemuel related his mother's

admonishment to steer clear of wine and women so that he could remain a good and just king. Annie's memory of chapter 31 started at verse 10, where the writer launched into the qualities of "a wife of noble character" as it said in her modern translation. Alice had stated the activities of the wife pretty well; she was the ultimate multitasker—she never "ate the bread of idleness." Annie thought it was going to be interesting to see how Jacob Martin had managed to take a few paragraphs about a king's mother's advice and turn it

into a play.

Annie glanced through the cast list again, wondering which parts Stella had in mind when she asked her retired actor friends to take part in the play. If Dolores Fortescue played the mother of the king, perhaps Cyril would play the part of the king's trusted advisor—Annie hadn't seen either of them before, but surely he couldn't be playing the part of her son. Whatever the case, it would undoubtedly bring a much higher level of professionalism to the production to

have two such seasoned actors.

Annie had intended to take notes as she read, but she became so involved in the plot and the characters that she forgot about everything else. The story, as it was told through the dialogue, swept her along, and when she reached the dramatic denouement, she unconsciously placed one hand over her heart, blinked back a few tears, and uttered aloud, "Oh." It was a story about loss and misunderstanding, but also the ultimate triumph of love and forgiveness. It touched Annie. She

could only imagine the effect it would have in a darkened theater before an audience.

Jacob had crafted characters that spoke to basic human concerns—choosing the right person to marry, “forsaking all others”; what it means to make a life and a home together; the loss of parents. Annie understood that loss; it wasn’t that many years ago that her own parents had passed away

Then her mind turned to the Fortescues. How hard it must be to lose a child, even one that is grown

up. That's not the way it's "supposed" to be. Annie tried not to think of her own daughter, LeeAnn, and how it would feel to lose her, but she couldn't help it. She was thankful for the present good health of her family, but she knew from experience how quickly life could change. Wayne's heart attack had happened without warning. He was gone in an instant. But losing a spouse is something different than losing a son or a daughter. A husband and wife know on some level, especially as the years go by, that inevitably, one of them will

meet death first. That knowledge doesn't lessen the pain of loss for the one left behind, but it is an underlying understanding of the nature of life.

In the play, the king confronted his grief at the death of his mother, but also his guilt at not always having followed her wise advice. The Bible didn't reveal the fate of King Lemuel, whether he listened to his mother or not, but Annie remembered reading about the problems that King Solomon had because of his many wives who led

him to stray from God's path. Even the very wise can fail.

The "treasure" of King Lemuel in Jacob's play was ultimately the wife he chose; after a few false starts, he came to realize that the value of the woman he would come to love was not in "deceptive charms" or "fleeting beauty," but in her character as seen through her actions. This was Jacob Martin's homage to his wife, Ophelia. She must have been someone very special for him to have written such a beautifully moving script.

Stella had hinted at problems

between Jacob and his in-laws. Though Annie didn't know what the source of the trouble was between them, she wondered what effect the play would have on the Fortescues. They had agreed to be in the play. Annie wondered if they had read it beforehand. There was certainly nothing in the play to prevent them from being in it—for actors, Annie thought, these would be wonderful roles. Perhaps, besides being a tribute to his wife, this was Jacob's way of reaching out to her parents.

Annie closed the pages that had been lying open on her lap as she ran through her thoughts about the play. She began to wonder what the experience of working on the production of the play was going to be like. Would the death of Ophelia Fortescue-Martin overshadow them all, or would her life buoy them up?

It was still morning, and having read through the play much more quickly than she had expected, Annie decided to give Alice a call to come over for dinner that evening. She didn't answer her cellphone, so Annie had to leave a message, but

Alice soon called back.

"I'm out delivering product this morning," said Alice, "and I have a party this afternoon, but I'll be finished by five, I'm sure. Dinner would be great—can I bring anything?"

"No, just bring yourself," replied Annie. "It's not going to be anything fancy—I'm just going to make a pot of vegetable soup."

"Sounds perfect," said Alice. "I'll be there about five-thirty, quarter-to-six, then."

Annie's first order of business was

to open the second-floor door to the narrow set of stairs that led to the attic and turn on the attic lights in hopes the space would warm a bit before the others arrived. She put the ingredients for vegetable soup in her slow cooker and spent the rest of the day doing chores around Grey Gables. The sun set shortly after four in the afternoon, and it didn't seem very long after that the doorbell rang.

Alice had arrived at Grey Gables bundled up against the cold and snow in the same getup as Annie had seen her in the previous

morning. She had changed from her dressy work clothes into jeans and a sweater suitable for rummaging through a cold attic and had brought along a sturdy pair of house shoes.

As Alice slipped her stockinged feet into her house shoes, she took a deep breath and asked, "Is the soup ready? It smells great. I'm starving."

Annie had already set the large wooden kitchen table with plates, napkins, soup spoons, and a tray of cheese and crackers. She ladled out

a large bowl of soup for Alice and placed it on one of the plates on the table, and then repeated the process for herself.

"Like I said earlier," said Annie, "it's nothing fancy, but hot and hearty soup just sounded good to me."

"It's perfect, Annie," said Alice. "Thanks for inviting me."

"You're welcome," said Annie. "There's nothing cozier than a warm meal with a good friend on a cold winter evening in Maine."

4

Annie and Alice had finished tidying up the kitchen after dinner and had just settled themselves on the living room sofa with Boots stretched out between them purring loudly when the doorbell rang. It was Mary Beth, Peggy, Kate, and Kate's daughter, Vanessa, all of whom had ridden over together in Mary Beth's SUV. As they were walking through Grey Gables's front door, Gwen's car pulled up in Annie's driveway. Gwen was a close

neighbor to Annie; her home, known as Wedgwood, was located on the same street—Ocean Drive—as Grey Gables. The distance normally required just a short walk in good weather, but on this night, the sky was clear and full of stars, and the temperature was dipping to near zero.

There was a definite uptick in the noise level and a flurry of activity as greetings were exchanged and as coats and hats and gloves and boots were removed. Boots's serenity was disturbed, and she raced through the legs of the

laughing women and bounded up the stairs to hide in Annie's bedroom.

Annie led the way up the stairs to the open attic door. When everyone had made it to the second floor hallway, Annie explained that she had left the door open and the lights on to make their search a little more comfortable. "I don't think it should be too awfully cold," she said.

"You forget that we're all tough Mainers, Annie," said Peggy. "We embrace the cold."

"Speak for yourself, Peggy," said Kate with a laugh. "The cold goes right through me if I'm not dressed for it. I've got on my wool long underwear."

"Good grief, Mom," said Vanessa, exasperated at Kate's lack of decorum. "It's not that cold."

"So says the teenage girl with twice the rate of my body metabolism," said Kate with a chuckle.

"I don't think anyone's going to freeze to death in an attic," said Gwen pragmatically. She reached into the pocket of her knitted

sweater and pulled out a folded piece of paper. "OK. I've got Professor Howell's property list. I penciled in a couple of items that I noticed when I read the play yesterday. Does anyone else have anything to add before we go on up?"

It turned out that Annie was the only other one who had read the play so far, and she had been too absorbed in the story to pay attention to the props.

"How are we going to do this?" asked Alice. "Shall we just start

rummaging? Or should we have a plan—divide and conquer?”

“Why don’t we let our resident fashion mavens look through the trunks for suitable clothing or fabric? I’m referring to Kate, Vanessa, and Peggy, of course,” said Annie.

“Do you know what you’re looking for yet?” asked Gwen.

“Sort of,” answered Kate. “Vanessa and I went to the library after she got out of school yesterday to see what we could find about costuming for theater productions and about clothing in

the Middle Ages. I found a few books and started looking through them for ideas last evening. I also scanned through the play just to read the descriptions that Jacob put in for each character and made some notes that I brought along." She patted a blue folder she was holding in the crook of her arm. "Vanessa found some good websites and printed out a few drawings and photographs too." Looking at Peggy, she said, "I think between the three of us, we can make a good start. One thing I did

learn from my reading last night was that for the theater, it's all about how it looks in the lights, not about how authentic it is to the time period, at least in terms of the kinds of materials we use. Wrinkles show up like crazy, so we have to be sure to avoid materials that hold creases."

"Maybe while you and Vanessa get started, I can just scan through your folder so I know what kinds of things to look for," said Peggy.

"And while you guys look for costumes, perhaps the rest of us could carry the area rugs

downstairs, and then we can determine their conditions and see if any of them will work," said Annie.

Gwen looked at the paper in her hand. "It just says 'large patterned area rug' on the list. I wish he would have been more specific about the size. I've never been on the stage at the theater—Peggy, do you have any idea how large it is?"

"Not really," answered Peggy. "I've only watched the girls practice their dance routines from the seats with all the other mothers."

"I think it's larger than you imagine when you are sitting in the audience," said Alice. "As I recall, there are a couple of really long carpet rolls up there. Let's get those first and take them downstairs so we can roll them out and have a look. Then we can go on from there."

It was agreed, and the group sprang into action. Though the steps up into the attic were narrow and somewhat steep, the attic itself was huge, and it was full of items of every imaginable type that Annie's grandmother had saved. The attic

room ran the length and width of the house, partitioned only by occasional columns that supported load-bearing beams. Each gable end contained an eyebrow window, and though they looked small from the outside of the house, they were actually very large, and in the daytime, they let in a good amount of light.

When Annie first returned to Grey Gables, the only artificial light in the attic was a solitary, bare lightbulb in the center of the room, which had to be turned on and off by a

pull string. Since then, Annie had had Wally install track lighting down the underside of the ridge of the roof, and she was grateful for all the illumination it provided now. Even so, it was still sometimes a little spooky in the attic. Annie didn't feel cold at that moment, but for some reason, she felt a shiver run through her as she knelt to pick up the end of one of the area rugs.

"These two carpet rolls look like they might be about ten feet long," said Alice. "Maybe they're ten by twelves. I hope at least one of them is in good enough condition."

Mary Beth had taken the other end of the rug that Annie had picked up, and Alice and Gwen grabbed the ends of the other long roll of carpet. They all moved carefully, single file—since that was really the only way to do it—first down the narrow flight of attic stairs, and then down the main staircase and into the center hallway.

After she had set down the end of her carpet roll, Gwen rubbed her hands over her biceps. “Who would think that a roll of carpet would be

so heavy? I'm going to have to start lifting weights or something."

"Me too," Alice agreed, shaking out her arms to loosen her strained muscles. "Why don't Gwen and I take our rug into the kitchen to roll out, and you guys can take yours into the living room. Then we can compare and see which one looks the best."

"Sounds like a good plan," said Annie.

Annie and Mary Beth knelt down again to pick up the rug, and again, Annie felt a shiver run up her spine as she touched her end of the

carpet. Must be someone walking over my grave, she thought to herself. That was one of the expressions her grandmother had often used. Gram was fond of those old folk sayings, and the fact that it had just popped into Annie's mind made her smile. Now she was the grandmother. What did her twin grandchildren think when she used one of those old sayings? Probably the same thing she had when she was little.

She and Mary Beth had laid down the carpet roll in the living room,

and Mary Beth stood silent, staring at the carpet, but not really seeing it. She had said very little since she arrived at Grey Gables, and Annie walked over and put her arm around Mary Beth's shoulders. "Are you all right?"

"Yes," said Mary Beth, a little startled. "I'm OK. I've just been thinking a lot. You know, trying to make sure I have everything in order, in case—" She stopped speaking, but Annie understood what she was talking about immediately.

"Mary Beth, I'm not saying it's not

a good idea to 'have everything in order,' but don't let it stop you from living in the present. None of us knows our fate. You or I could live another fifty years, or we could die tomorrow. You know as well as I do that there are no guarantees. Please try to put those thoughts in their proper place. Call and make an appointment with your lawyer, if you need to—or whatever else you think you should do—but then let it go. I'm grateful that Wayne had been diligent about keeping our finances in order so that I would be

well taken care of in the event of his death, or that he would be all right if I had gone first, for that matter. But don't miss out on the present by getting lost in what may or may not come to pass. We all love you. Be present here with us now, and let the future take care of itself. The scripture says, 'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.' In other words, 'Don't trouble trouble until trouble troubles you.'" Annie smiled inwardly at the use of another of Gram's favorite sayings.

"I know you're right, Annie," said Mary Beth. "It's just hard to forget

about it. I'm at that age where I've thought about death, but really only like it's something that's going to happen to other people, and not to me. At least, that's the way I felt before yesterday. It's such a lonely feeling. I didn't expect to feel this way, but I do. It's like I'm facing a voyage, and there's no one else on board except me."

"I think that's human nature, to feel alone," said Annie. "But when you start to feel that way, try to remember God's promises to us, 'Lo, I am with you always, even

unto the end of the world.' One of my mother's favorite hymns was Abide With Me. She used to sing it when she washed the dishes, believe it or not." The memory of her mother standing at the kitchen sink, her hands in soapy dishwater, quietly singing hymns as she washed and rinsed each dish, while Annie dried them and put them away, brought a smile to Annie's face. "I always loved that line, 'change and decay in all around I see, O Thou who changest not, abide with me.' The knowledge that God is unchangeable and ever-

present is a comfort, I think. And He promises that He will—abide with us, that is. And I know that you know you can trust in His promises. Just try to remember it when you start to feel alone.”

Mary Beth smiled. “I will, Annie. And you’re right, I do know; I guess this is a good opportunity for me to grow in faith.”

“And for all of us to do the same,” said Annie.

“OK. Enough of this,” said Mary Beth, taking a deep breath and squaring her shoulders. “I’m in the

present. Let's move this coffee table and roll out this rug to see what we've got."

Annie and Mary Beth had to move a few more things besides the coffee table, and it took several minutes to clear enough space to lay the roll of carpet straight across the room and to begin to unroll it. After unrolling it a couple of feet, they saw the edge of a piece of muslin fabric that spanned the carpet a foot or so short of each side.

As Annie and Mary Beth continued to unroll the rug,

revealing more of the muslin fabric, Alice and Gwen came into the room.

“How’s it going in here?” asked Alice. “I don’t think our rug is going to work without some serious cleaning and repair. I hope this one is in better condition.”

“This one seems to have a protective covering over the center part,” said Annie, “and the edges look pretty good.”

Annie and Mary Beth both stood up when they reached the end of the open space—it wasn’t possible

to roll out the last couple of feet of the rug, but the muslin fabric that lay on top was completely free. Annie knelt down to try to move it so they could see more of the carpet.

"It's two layers of muslin machine-stitched together," said Annie. She picked up the edge between her fingers and thumb. "I think there's something inside." She felt that prickly feeling along her spine again.

Now all of the ladies moved to the edge of the carpet to feel the muslin fabric. "You're right," said

Gwen. "But I think it's too thin to be another area rug."

"This end is whipstitched together by hand," said Mary Beth. "Do you have a seam ripper or a pair of small scissors handy, Annie?"

"I have both over in my sewing basket," said Annie. She walked over to the side table that normally sat next to her favorite armchair; she and Mary Beth had moved it, along with the chair, to make space in the center of the room. From a small covered basket that sat on the lower shelf of the table, Annie

retrieved both tools.

"Do you want the ripper or the scissors?" Annie asked Mary Beth.

"I'll take the ripper, if you don't mind," she answered.

Starting at opposite ends, Annie and Mary Beth began carefully cutting through the sewing thread that held the muslin pocket edge together. When they had finished, the four women began working together to pull back the muslin to reveal what was inside.

"What are you guys doing?" asked Peggy, who had just come downstairs with an armful of fabric.

All four ladies had been intent on their efforts and were startled at the sound of Peggy's voice.

"For Pete's sake, Peggy," said Alice. "Don't sneak up on us like that!"

"I didn't," said Peggy, somewhat indignantly. "I just came down to get some of this fabric we might use for the play out of the way. So, again, what are you guys doing?"

"There was something else rolled inside the carpet, and we're trying to find out what it is," said Gwen.

"Oh cool! You've found another

mystery!" said Peggy.

"Not so fast, Peggy," said Annie. "Let's just see what we've got before we make that sort of judgment. Could you flip on the overhead light so we can see better?"

Peggy deposited her load of fabric on the hallway bench near the door and then found the switch. Light flooded the room. Peggy pitched in to help the others, and when the muslin was completely removed, all five women stood along one side, surveying their discovery with a sense of wonder.

It was a tapestry—a huge tapestry, measuring at least five feet high by ten feet wide. It was divided into twelve scenes. In each scene, what appeared to be the same woman was shown working at a different activity, and in the upper right corner of each scene there was a small moon at a different phase of its cycle.

On the top row, at the far left, the woman was shown tenderly tucking into bed a young child with the same color of hair as herself; the bed was piled high with brightly

colored blankets and a small window behind them showed the air filled with snowflakes. In the second scene, the woman sat in a darkened room next to a stone hearth, stirring a large black pot that hung over red-hot embers; steam appeared to lazily rise from the contents of the pot. In the third scene, the woman was out of doors, carrying a large, partially filled bag at her side. The bag was made with a single wide strap that was wrapped over one shoulder and spanned across her body. She was reaching out to gather a mass of

wool stuck in a bush as several sheep grazed and a single lamb gamboled across a hill in the background. In the fourth scene, she planted seeds in furrowed rows of brown earth while trees alongside showed tiny green buds that seemed to be about to open into leaves. In the fifth scene, she sat holding a distaff in one hand and spinning a spindle with the other to make yarn. In the last scene on the top row, the woman was shown surrounded by raggedly dressed children as she handed out

pieces of bread to them.

On the bottom row on the far left side, the tapestry showed the woman walking along a cobblestone street carrying a large basket filled with fruits and vegetables. The next scene showed her sitting before a loom weaving an intricately patterned cloth. In the next scene, the woman appeared to be showing the length of cloth she had woven to a merchant who offered her coins in exchange. In the next scene, she was shown filling a lamp with oil while another lamp, suspended by a chain

attached to a hook on the wall, burned brightly behind her. In the next-to-last scene, the woman was shown hand-sewing the hem of a long caftan-like garment. The final scene showed the woman in profile, sitting at a table with her head bowed over an open book with black edges, her hands grasping the sides of the pages.

The colors in the tapestry varied from darker muted browns, greens and blues that provided depth to the scenes, to brighter tones of reds, greens, blues and yellows

used in clothing that brought the figures to the fore. Faces and hands were peachy flesh tones. Neutral grays and tans added shadows and defined shapes, and soft whites provided highlights. As Annie scanned the scenes, she was astounded by the detail; the faces conveyed expression, the fabrics that were pictured had visible patterns and looked as if they were draped; even tiny leaves had veins. Each small moon was ivory-colored with golden and silvery threads woven in around the edges that made it, and each seemed to glow.

Annie paused a moment. Something about the look of the tapestry tugged at her memory, but she couldn't quite capture it.

Mary Beth was the first to speak. "Do you think this is some sort of a calendar? I mean, with the twelve scenes that would make sense."

"Yes, but what about the moons in different phases?" asked Gwen.

"Well, in each month the moon goes through all its phases—in twenty-nine or thirty days, I think," said Annie. "So it would be consistent with the calendar idea,

but it might also relate as a symbol of womanhood—as in the word ‘menses’ for a woman’s ‘time of the month,’ as we say, which comes from the Latin word for month.”

There was a pause as the women considered this.

“I know what this is!” said Alice, nearly shouting, a triumphant look on her face.

“What?” asked Peggy.

“It’s the Proverbs 31 woman—look—it’s just like I told you yesterday. See—she’s cooking and planting and weaving and sewing and all the other things—it’s all

there!”

“I think you’re right, Alice!” said Gwen.

Annie said, “I agree; I just reread those verses this morning. But I think Mary Beth is right too. Look at the arrangement—I mean, provided you’re meant to read it like a page in a book—right to left, top to bottom. I don’t think it follows the order of the activities as they are given in Proverbs; it’s like the tapestry maker rearranged them in order to make them fit the plan of a calendar—see, there’s snow in the

January panel, and she's planting in the April panel—I think you're both right—it is the Proverbs 31 woman, and it's a kind of calendar too."

Then Annie noticed something down in the bottom right corner, at the lower part of the scene of the woman reading:
L.C.~MCMLXVI~L.C. The roman-font letters were placed within a narrow rectangular panel, and surrounding the letters were green vines interspersed with white lilies. In her surprise, Annie clapped her hand over her opened mouth.

"What is it, Annie?" asked Mary

Beth.

"I know this ... I mean, I've seen this."

"You've seen what?" asked Alice.

Annie pointed to the corner. "The letters—there, under the reading woman." Then she made her way over to stand next to the niche near the front window where the little "Home Song" tapestry had hung for at least forty years within her memory, and probably longer. All eyes were on Annie as she pointed to the bottom panel where there was an almost identical set of

letters to the ones on the large
tapestry.

5

The discovery of the tapestry almost completely derailed the Hook and Needle Club members' good intentions to look for props. Kate and Vanessa had come downstairs, bringing with them clothing and some costume jewelry that they had found for the play, but then they, too, were drawn into the mystery of the tapestry with the others.

Annie had removed the small tapestry from its place and laid it

next to the scene of the reading woman. The small tapestry was the same size as one of the panels on the larger tapestry, and there was no doubt in her mind that both had been fashioned by the same hands. While the small tapestry had the Roman numerals for 1946, the large one had numerals that added up to 1966—a twenty-year gap between the two. Now Annie truly regretted not having asked her grandmother about the maker of the small tapestry.

It was Alice who immediately saw its possibility as a backdrop for

the stage setting of the great hall of the king's castle in the play. "Don't you see?" she asked. "This is perfect! It goes with the theme of the play, which Stella already told us was the Proverbs 31 woman, and it goes with the time period we're supposed to be looking for. Tapestries were hung in castles in the Middle Ages, not just for art's sake, but to help reduce drafts and provide some warmth in an environment that was constructed out of cold stones. It just couldn't be any more authentic."

Annie hesitated. Here was another mystery that her grandmother had left for her to work out. The tapestry was such a beautiful thing. Why was it hidden away? This wasn't the first time she had asked herself the same question about other articles she had found in the attic. It had always turned out before that there was some good reason for it, but she couldn't imagine what this one could be. The tapestry was a work of art; it should've been displayed in a museum all these years instead of waiting for someone to find it.

Waiting for me to find it, thought Annie. It seemed to be in very good condition, and she was thankful for that, but she wondered if using it in the play was a good idea. What if it were to get torn or stained or something awful like that?

"Let me think about it, Alice," said Annie.

"Of course," replied Alice. "It just seems a shame that something so beautiful has been hidden away in this old rug. Wouldn't it be great for it to literally be in the spotlight?"

"That's another thing to worry

about,” said Annie. “What effect would stage lighting have on a tapestry like this? It would be just awful if it faded from the wrong kind of exposure to light.” She looked again at the small tapestry, comparing its colors with that of the large one. It had been protected by its position away from the sun and by the jutting sides of the niche, yet fading had occurred.

“I’m sure there’s a way to get around that. Perhaps we could set it up so it’s only onstage during the actual performances—that would only be a few hours.” Alice’s

expression was hopeful, and Annie hated to say no.

"We'll see. I just want to be sure that nothing happens to it," said Annie.

The following Saturday, just before closing time, all of the ladies of the Hook and Needle Club, bundled up in their winter garbs, gathered at A Stitch in Time. Mary Beth was there too, even though she had had her biopsy the day before. Gwen had gone with her to

provide moral support, driving Mary Beth to Portland, where her oncologist's office was located. The doctor had told Mary Beth that he would be sending her tissue samples to a lab for testing.

"The doctor told me that the results wouldn't be available for at least two or three weeks," said Mary Beth. "So I'll have to wait and see if the lump is malignant, or not."

"Are you sure you feel well enough to come to the meeting with Jacob and Professor Howell?" asked Stella.

“Yes, I’m sure; I’m only a little sore. I actually had a nap this afternoon since Kate and Vanessa ran the store today.” Mary Beth looked at Kate and Vanessa with a smile. “Thanks for that, girls. I probably could have worked if I had to, but it was nice to have a bit of time to just relax.”

Annie was glad to see that since they had spoken that evening at Grey Gables, Mary Beth seemed to be less introverted and was more like her old self.

When it was nearly time for the

meeting at the Cultural Center to begin, they went outside the store, waiting for Kate as she locked the door. Then she gave her daughter a quick hug, arranging to meet her at the library after the meeting.

En masse the Hook and Needle Club members crossed Main Street and walked to the Cultural Center. The building that housed the museum and new theater, at four stories, was one of the tallest buildings in Stony Point. It had once been a successful dry-goods store known as "Walker's."

The glass entry doors weren't

locked since the museum was still open. There were a few people milling around, looking over an exhibit of pottery which included some work of local artisans. Stella stopped for a moment to speak to Bill Witherell, one of the volunteers on duty, and then the ladies made their way to the elevator to take them to the fourth floor where the conference room was located.

The Hook and Needle Club ladies bunched into the elevator. Just as the doors were closing, Ian Butler, the mayor of Stony Point, shouted,

“Hold the door, ladies!” as he dashed toward the elevator.

Ian Butler was tall and ruggedly handsome with short-cropped hair that was graying at the temples. The corners of his chocolate brown eyes crinkled when he smiled, which was often. He and Annie had been out on friendly dates a few times, but Annie wasn't ready for anything romantic—at least not yet—so they had kept their outings low key, though it was obvious to everyone that Ian would be happy with something more serious.

Like Annie's husband, Ian's wife,

Arianna, had died unexpectedly, leaving him grief-stricken. But Ian was at a different stage of grief than Annie, having had much more time to work through his emotions. Though he would never forget Arianna, he knew he had to put those memories of their life together in their proper place to be able to move on. He still struggled with it at times, but he didn't want to live the rest of his days on earth alone.

Now, he had managed to stand next to Annie in the elevator, but

he addressed them all. "How is everyone today?"

Stella answered for the group. "We're fine, Mayor Butler. I'm glad you could make it." Stella hadn't mentioned to the others that she had invited Ian; Annie wondered who else might be sitting in on the meeting.

As the others chatted, Ian leaned over toward Annie and said in a low voice, "Are you ready for this? I met Professor Howell last week. He's quite a character."

"As ready as I'll ever be," replied Annie. "I'm excited about this play,

though. I'm sure it will take me outside my comfort zone—like when you and I were extras in the movie that was filmed in Stony Point a while back. It's good to do things that are out of the ordinary now and then."

"Arianna was an actress, even before we were married, you know." Ian's eyes became distant as he remembered his wife. "It was a sacrifice for her to move from the big city to Stony Point. She loved the theater, but thankfully, I guess she loved me more." He smiled,

and Annie's heart skipped a beat. "She continued to be part of the theater scene though, often in the summer months at the Ogunquit and the Hackmatack Playhouses. She especially enjoyed working with the children who came to the summer drama camps. She would have been thrilled that Stony Point has its own theater."

"I wish I could have known her, Ian," said Annie. "Everyone always says what a wonderful woman she was."

"She was that," said Ian. "I guess we were both lucky to have had

happy marriages and to have those good memories to carry with us. Not everyone is so fortunate."

The elevator doors opened to a small vestibule with a hallway strutting out from each side. There was plush, deep red carpeting over wood flooring, with gorgeous inlaid wood visible along the edges. Annie had never been on this level of the building before, and as she and the others followed Stella down the left-hand hallway, she was surprised at how sumptuous the surroundings seemed. The walls

were finished with what Annie recognized as expensive Venetian plaster and bordered by beautifully carved woodwork. The rooms were mostly empty, but someone had been keeping the place clean. She could see no dust anywhere.

Perhaps realizing what was on Annie's mind as well as the others, Stella said, "This floor was used for offices in Gerald Walker's day; he was the son of the founder of the original Walker's dry-goods store here in Stony Point. When they had this building constructed in the 1920s, the store was in its heyday,

and no expense was spared. When the store closed in the seventies, this floor was leased to Gordon Proctor's father and uncle, who were both lawyers too."

Annie knew Gordon Proctor fairly well—he had been Betsy Holden's attorney, and it was he who called her in Texas after the death of her grandmother to tell her she was to inherit Grey Gables.

Stella continued, "The condition of the offices had declined along with the fortunes of the store, but when the law office of Proctor &

Proctor moved in, they refurbished everything. When the owner of the Walker Building decided to sell it, Gordon bought that house on Elm Street and moved the practice over there."

Stella stopped speaking since they had reached the conference room. Annie admired the high ceiling and the tall windows and the elaborate woodwork; they reflected the popular art deco style of the 1920s. One wall, at the end of the room opposite the door, was given over to a magnificent built-in bookcase that stood empty at

present.

An extra-long rectangular table sat in the center of the room and cloth-covered office chairs surrounded it; a few additional chairs were lined up along the walls. Annie realized that these didn't seem to fit in with the twenties era—they must have been new purchases, bought by the Cultural Center committee as workhorse furniture, rather than investing in expensive pieces. It made sense to Annie that there were other more public places

where the money they had raised was more wisely spent.

“You may put your coats on the side chairs and then take a seat anywhere around the table,” said Stella, “but let’s leave this one at the far end open for Professor Howell.” After she had taken off her coat, Stella proceeded to seat herself next to Professor Howell’s chair at the end of the table while the rest of the group found other seats.

Stella’s action caused Annie to once again take note of the change in Stella’s appearance, as she had

at the Hook and Needle Club meeting earlier that week. It wasn't just the softer hairdo and the additional makeup; no-nonsense Stella was wearing a colorful new dress that wasn't quite her normal style. It was much more feminine—a solid-color satiny under-dress with a crinkly, mottled chiffon overlay that seemed to float about Stella. "Can a woman her age still get a crush? Maybe ... " thought Annie.

Her thought was interrupted by the entrance of a person who could only be Professor Howell. And

“entrance” was the right word. Every eye turned to focus on the professor as he entered the room, and he said cheerfully, “Greetings, ladies and gentleman! I hope I haven’t kept you waiting. I was a little lost, but your volunteer Mr. Witherell was kind enough to show Felix and me the way.”

It was only then that Annie even noticed the young man behind Professor Howell. He was laden down with a cardboard box in his arms and an expensive leather briefcase dangling precariously from his fingers. His dark brown-rimmed

glasses, that matched the color of his hair, had begun to slip uncomfortably down his nose.

“Here, let me help you with that.” Ian got up and took the box from Felix’s arms as Professor Howell continued across the room to Stella. Felix reached up to push his glasses back up to the bridge of his nose and said a quiet “Thanks” to Ian. Indicating the chairs along the wall with a nod of his head, he said, “Could you just put the box on one of the chairs over there?” Ian complied, and Felix proceeded to

take the briefcase to the seat at the far end of the table. He carefully sat the briefcase on the table to open it and remove a few papers which he laid neatly in front of the professor's seat. Then Felix closed the case, taking it with him, and went to sit next to the cardboard box.

While this was happening, the professor had taken Stella's hand. At first Annie thought he was actually going to kiss it, but instead, he only did a curt bow over it. Stella, who appeared to be blushing slightly, was visibly pleased by this behavior, though it was normally

the sort of thing Annie thought Stella would have disdained in other circumstances. Annie was seeing Stella in a whole new light—instead of stern matron, she was transformed into Auntie Mame. Who would have thought it? Annie glanced across the table at Alice and caught her eye. She was watching the same scene unfold, and Annie knew by the way she slightly raised her eyebrows that she was equally amazed at Stella's change of demeanor in the presence of Professor Howell.

As Stella and the professor exchanged chitchat, Annie reflected that he wasn't precisely what she had pictured when Alice first told her about him. She had to admit to herself that her original rendering of the man in her imagination was cartoonish. No, he wasn't so simplistic as that, she told herself, but he was undoubtedly a theatrical figure.

Professor Howell was, as Alice had said she imagined him, a portly older gentleman, but with his closely trimmed snow-white hair and matching mustache and beard,

in Annie's opinion, he would not have been mistaken for Santa Claus, or Colonel Sanders for that matter. He was somewhat younger than Stella; Annie guessed he was approaching retirement age. He spoke with an accent that Annie couldn't quite place. It seemed to be a cross between an English accent and a Franklin D. Roosevelt-type accent. His voice was deep, and his diction was clear; confidence exuded from him—in every word he said and in every gesture he made—and he was very

fond of making gestures when he spoke. He wasn't really all that large a person, but it seemed as if he took up more space in the room than everyone else.

After the professor removed his camel-color cashmere overcoat, Annie took note of his attire. He was wearing a tweed jacket with leather patches on the elbows and a multicolored, paisley-patterned pocket square tucked into the breast pocket, along with dark brown wool slacks and dark brown suede wingtip shoes. Underneath the jacket he wore a knitted,

maroon color waistcoat with leather-covered shank buttons, a crisp white shirt, and a tie made from the same fabric as the pocket square. If there would have been a role in a movie that called for an eccentric professor, she would have said that Professor Howell fit the bill perfectly.

Just then, another man was ushered into the room by Mr. Witherell. This must be Jacob Martin, thought Annie. He seemed the very opposite of Professor Howell. Annie would have guessed

that Jacob was about Kate's age, even if Kate hadn't mentioned that she went to high school with him. His hair was longish and a nondescript brown color, but his clear blue eyes were kind, and though he wasn't smiling, there was a soothing pleasantness about his expression. He was in jeans and lumberjack-type, tie-up leather boots. His navy blue wool pea coat was unbuttoned, revealing a cable-patterned Aran-type pullover beneath.

"Ah, there you are, my boy," said Professor Howell, gesturing for

Jacob to join them at the table. "Take a seat, and let's get started, shall we?"

As Jacob took his place at the end of the table opposite the professor, Annie tried to assess the two men—one responsible for the words and ideas of the play, and the other responsible for how those words and ideas would be presented to the public. The two men couldn't have been more different, and yet, she thought, they seemed to complement one another, at least in their respective

roles. It was hard to imagine them having much in common otherwise.

6

Still standing, Professor Howell moved from Stella's side to stand in front of his chair at the end of the conference table. He took charge of the meeting. "I'll start the meeting by introducing myself." As he spoke he lightly placed one hand over his chest, his fingers splayed out, and he punctuated his words with the motion of his opposite hand. "I am Professor Rudyard G. Howell—you may call me Professor Howell. I will be the director of King Lemuel's

Treasure. I do trust that all of you have read the play?" It was a statement and a question all in one. Everyone around the table, except Jacob, nodded to indicate that they had done so.

"Excellent. Now, as I understand from Mrs. Brickson, you are nearly all novices in the theater, but we won't let that detain us from producing a fabulous show for our audience. I want you all to remember that my job here is not that of a parent. I'm not here to see that you get your homework done on time or that you don't stay up

too late. I expect self-discipline on your part to meet deadlines and to fulfill your functions as part of this company.

“My job is comparable to that of an obstetrician. Jacob has written a marvelous play. That is our fetus; our actions will determine whether it is brought into the world as a thriving baby, or if it will suffer and die. We do not want that to happen!” The professor punctuated his last sentence by slapping the table with the palms of both of his hands. Annie jumped slightly even

though she was watching him the entire time. She almost wondered what she had gotten herself into. It was hard to take her eyes off the professor, but she stole a glance around the room. Were the others thinking the same thing? Her eyes landed on Stella. She gazed at Professor Howell with a look that bordered on adoration. Good grief, thought Annie.

The professor continued to speak, reaching out to take Stella's hand, "Of course, all of you know Mrs. Stella Brickson, but if you would, please, dear lady, stand and

tell everyone what your contribution will be to the play, and indeed, what it already has been.”

The professor took Stella’s elbow to help her to stand even though Annie and all the other members of the Hook and Needle Club knew that she didn’t really need it. Stella would’ve told anyone else to back off, saying, “I am not an invalid!” Annie knew it was true because she had heard her say that very thing in similar situations. It was just another sign that Stella was not herself around Professor Howell.

"Thank you, Professor," said Stella, her eyelids fluttering. She looked around the room and said, "I will be acting as the producer of the play, as a representative of the Cultural Center committee. Besides looking after the purse strings for the production, my job is to see that Professor Howell has all the people and things he deems are necessary for the play." With that Stella took her seat again.

"Excellent," said the professor. Looking down at the papers that Felix had laid out before him at the table, he unhurriedly reached into

his jacket pocket at his side, took out an eyeglasses case, opened it, unfolded a pair of designer reading glasses and perched them on his nose.

"Which of you is Alice MacFarlane?" he asked. His chin was down, and he looked over the frames of his eyeglasses at them all.

Annie saw Alice hesitate a moment, and then she stood up. "That would be me, Professor Howell," said Alice.

"Excellent." It seemed to be

Professor Howell's favorite word. "Mrs. Brickson has recommended you as our set designer." Looking at the page again, he said, "It says here that you have a career in the field of home decor—is that correct?"

Again, Annie could see that Alice was hesitating. "You could say that, I suppose," said Alice, somewhat timidly.

"Well, it's not a matter of what I say—do you or don't you?" asked the professor.

His words caused a change in Alice's expression, and her face

took on a slightly pinker hue. Annie could see a fire had been lit inside her friend. "Yes, I do have a career in home decor, and I'm quite knowledgeable. Besides being my livelihood, I've taken several courses and have read extensively about interior design and the history of architecture. I admit I don't really have any experience in the theater, but I am a quick study, and I'm sure I can do an excellent job." Alice emphasized the word "excellent."

The professor opened his mouth,

and Annie could see that he had started to say "excellent" but paused and said instead, "Very good." Then he asked, "Do you have any talent for drawing or any other representational skill?"

"Yes, I do," said Alice. She had apparently decided that humble was not the way to be with Professor Howell. "I often make my own embroidery designs, and I provide sketches and photographs of groupings for my clients to help them see how the home decor products that I represent can be used to the best advantage in their

homes.”

“That will be fine, Mrs. MacFarlane; I think we can work with this. You may sit down. One of the students in my department, Carl Johnson, is specializing in set design, and you will be working with him. He’ll be able to assemble our ideas into a computer image to work with. I have brought along two books I would like you to read.” He looked briefly at Felix who started shuffling through his cardboard box and came up with two large books that he brought

over to the table and placed in front of Alice. Without pausing, Professor Howell continued, "Then you and Carl and I will schedule a meeting next week with this fellow—" the professor looked at his paper again, "Wally Carson, who I understand has been contracted to be in charge of building our set." He looked around. "Is Mr. Carson here today?" he asked.

Peggy stood up, a little wide-eyed, looking as if she might run away at any moment, and said, "No, sir. I'm Peggy Carson, Wally's wife. He's at a job today, but

starting the first of next month, he'll be reporting to the Cultural Center to start setting up his shop on the main floor in the back room by the parking lot."

"Yes, I've seen that space," said the professor. "It should do very well for the shop since it has the loading dock to bring in materials and a freight elevator to get the finished pieces up to the backstage area. Please tell your husband that Felix will be calling him to set up an appointment as soon as possible." Professor Howell didn't say, "Make

a note of that, Felix," but apparently he didn't have to as Felix immediately pulled a small handheld device from his pocket and started punching in characters.

"Yes, sir," said Peggy. For a moment Annie thought Peggy was going to curtsy, but she didn't. She did continue to stand, waiting for permission to sit.

Professor Howell was looking down at his paper again. "Ah, here we are. It says here, Mrs. Carson, that you are a 'people person.' Is that how you would describe yourself?"

Looking at Alice, Peggy seemed to have decided it was best not to fudge. "Yes, sir. I would say so. In normal circumstances, I think most people would say that I'm outgoing, and I like to be around all kinds of people."

Professor Howell looked at her again, his eyes narrowing. "I've seen you before, haven't I? Yes. You were speaking with Mrs. Brickson the other night in the theater, when she was giving me the tour, and all those little girls were running about."

"Yes, sir," Peggy said again. "My daughter, Emily, is going to be in the dance recital next week. It was one of their practice nights."

"Do you have any experience on stage yourself?" asked the professor.

"Yes, sir, I do. Mrs. Butler took me to summer drama camp two years in a row, when I was 12 and 13, and besides that, I played the lead in Stony Point High School's yearly musical four years running."

"And who is this 'Mrs. Butler'?" asked Professor Howell.

"That's Mayor Butler's wife," said

Peggy. Looking at Ian, she said, "Oh" She covered her mouth with the tips of her fingers as if she had made a terrible gaffe. "I'm sorry, Mr. Mayor. What I mean is, she was his wife. She ... she passed away a while ago."

"That's OK, Peggy," said Ian, giving her a reassuring smile.

"Of course—Mayor Butler—I should have realized," said the professor, almost to himself. Then he said to Peggy, "Then it would be safe to say, I suppose, that you have a strong voice?"

"Yes, I do," replied Peggy. "I haven't had the opportunity to sing much in public since high school though, except in the church choir."

"Why don't you sing something for us now," said the professor, looking back down at his notes.

Peggy swallowed hard. "Now?"

"Is there some reason you can't now?" asked the professor.

Peggy took a deep breath. "It's just that I haven't ... uh ... prepared anything."

"Sing whatever it was you sang with the church choir most recently," said the professor

nonchalantly.

“Well, OK, then.”

Annie had heard Peggy sing with the choir, but never on her own. It was a small choir, and they didn't perform very often, but the choir was large enough that Annie had never really tried to pick out voices. She wasn't sure what the professor was doing asking Peggy to sing on the spur of the moment like this.

Then Peggy closed her eyes and began singing very slowly in a rich, soulful voice,

“Abide with me, fast falls the

eventide,

The darkness deepens, Lord with
me abide,

When other helpers fail and
comforts flee,

Help of the helpless, O abide with
me."

She paused and skipped ahead to
the final verse of the classic hymn,
moving her voice up the scale to
sing with more urgency, and
repeating the final line, but
changing it slightly,

"Hold Thou Thy cross before my
closing eyes,

Shine through the gloom and

point me to the skies,

As morning breaks and earth's
vain shadows flee,

In life, in death, O Lord, abide
with me.

Through life and death, O Lord,
abide with me."

The room was silent when she
had finished, and it was as if there
were some palpable presence that
bade them not to speak and
certainly not to applaud—it would
have been unthinkable. Annie had
no idea that Peggy was capable of
making such beautiful music. She

felt the sting of tears in her own eyes, and when she looked over at Mary Beth, she was already pulling a tissue out of her purse. Jacob Martin's head was bowed down, and she couldn't see his face, but his body language seemed to indicate that he, too, was moved.

Even Professor Howell seemed to be affected by Peggy's performance and was unable or unwilling to speak and break the spell, but finally, he cleared his throat and said, "That, my dear, is what we call a showstopper in the theater." Looking at Stella, he said, "You

were right. I think she has what it takes for the part."

Peggy looked confused. "What part?" she asked.

"Mrs. Brickson suggested you for the part of Abigail, the king's sister. I wasn't convinced, but I believe you can do it. Well done, Mrs. Carson. You may sit down now."

Peggy sat down, slightly dazed. Annie saw her look over at Stella, and the oldest and the youngest members of the Hook and Needle Club exchanged smiles—Annie read their expressions: Peggy's said

"thank you," and Stella's said "you're welcome."

Professor Howell continued down his list, calling on each member of the Hook and Needle Club in turn. As Annie watched him proceed to interrogate each person, she began to understand that what she was seeing was the teacher in action. He seemed to know just how much to push to make the person he was addressing push back rather than fold. He adjusted his technique depending on the person. He laid out his expectations, but also encouraged each of them, in a

slightly backhand way, to say outright what she considered to be her strengths if not her weaknesses.

With Gwen, he was all business. She was to be in charge of advertising and organizing any printed material and ginning up sponsors. Ian promised to help by mentioning the play at any event he was asked to speak at, which happened quite often.

With Mary Beth, the professor changed tacks. He spoke with gentleness, no doubt having been

informed by Stella of her recent news, and sometimes precarious emotional state. Peggy's song seemed to have affected her more than anyone else, and her face was still a little splotchy from the tears she had shed.

The professor explained he that wanted to arrange special instrumental music for the intermission between the acts of the play, and asked Mary Beth if she was interested in trying to organize any Stony Point musicians who might be available to form an ensemble with students from the

college. Mary Beth played the flute herself and was part of Stony Point's community band.

"We have a fine music department at Longfellow," said Professor Howell, "and Professor Torres has agreed to put together a program of compositions from the medieval era, arranged for modern-day instruments, so we're looking more for instruments that can be translated to mimic those from the Middle Ages, like the flute, the recorder, the guitar, perhaps the dulcimer or the harp, and also

something akin to the tambor for percussion—so it's really quite specialized and not your normal set of band instruments."

When Mary Beth gave her consent, the professor said, "Excellent. I'll give you Professor Torres's number at the college so you can speak to her directly. She can tell you much better than I what is required."

The professor moved on to Kate next. "Is Kate Stevens here?" he asked.

As the others had done, Kate stood up, looking a little nervous.

"I'm here."

"Good. I see here that you design crochet patterns. What can you tell me about that?" asked the professor.

"Well," began Kate, "it requires math skills and an understanding of how garments need to be constructed to fit the human body comfortably. One has to consider the 'hand' and the drapability of the fabric that is being made, and to make sure there is enough ease in the proper places when it's assembled." She paused to think a

moment. “It also requires knowledge of colorways—what works together and what doesn’t. And also how different types of yarn behave—some types of fibers work better for certain types of clothing than others. For instance, wool traps heat against the body, but it also wicks perspiration away from the body. That’s why it’s so great for winter wear and socks in particular.” She paused again and asked herself, “Let’s see, what else? ... Oh, I know. Designing clothing also requires imagination and a certain amount of research both in

current trends in fashion and in historic costuming as well. I'm always on the lookout for inspiration."

"Do you know anything about the era in question?" asked the professor.

"I really didn't until I did some research, along with my daughter, Vanessa, at the library and on the Internet this week. I know a bit more now."

"Very good. Now, a costume designer for the theater may need to make large purchases to fulfill

the needs for multiple costumes. And you'll have to think about the entire package, not just dresses and shirts and breeches, but cloaks and hats and belts and other accessories. This isn't a professional endeavor, and I know that the committee wants to keep costs down as much as possible, so buying in bulk sometimes helps. Do you have any purchasing experience?" asked the professor.

"Well, yes, actually I do. I work for Mary Beth at A Stitch in Time, just across the street, and we share the purchasing duties," replied

Kate.

“Excellent. I think you’ll do. You may sit down,” said the professor. He looked at his paper again. “There are two young ladies—Sarah Caufield and Vera Hartley—in the theater department at the college who are willing to volunteer to work with you in both designing and sewing. I’ll give you their contact information. You can sew, too, can’t you?” asked the professor.

“Yes,” answered Kate. “I was in 4-H when I was in school, and besides crocheting, I’ve often sewn

outfits for myself and my daughter.”

“Even with the help of Sarah and Vera, it may tax your time limits, especially if you are working full-time,” said Professor Howell. “I would suggest that you seek out others in Stony Point who might be able to help assemble costumes. I have several reference books for you to take home to study.” That sentence set Felix in motion again. He reached into his cardboard box and pulled out four large books that he placed on the table before Kate. “Also, I’d like to see sketches of your designs before you proceed to

the next step. Can you do that?"

"Yes. I've started a few of the main characters' costumes already," said Kate.

"Excellent. Remember, in the theater, it's all about how it looks from the perspective of the audience, but it also needs to be easy for the actors to get into and out of. Simple is better in this case; authentic details are wonderful for close-ups in films, but it's generally unnecessary for theatrical costumes. So we'll use zippers and Velcro and the like, even though

they had no such things in those days. Also, that book on top of your stack has a particularly good section concerning how colors should be used to the best effect in stage lighting. Pay close attention to that. We'll schedule a meeting for the week after next," said the professor.

Looking at his list again, he said, speaking to Stella more than anyone else, "We don't seem to have anyone in Stony Point for hair and makeup. The student actors are trained to put on their own makeup, but I'm not sure our

resident expert at the college is going to be available to help us. I'd really like to have someone at hand, especially for Dolores and Cyril. They're used to a professional atmosphere."

Peggy's hand shot into the air, as if she were in a classroom.

The professor smiled and said, "Yes, Mrs. Carson?"

"My sister—Mitzy—is a hairdresser, and she's really good. She's great with makeup too."

"OK," said the professor. "The theater has special requirements for

hair and makeup—makeup in particular is very specialized. We'll give her a chance; arrange for her to be at the theater on Monday at five o'clock, and I'll interview her then."

Again, movement across the room caught Annie's eye as Felix quickly punched the keys of his electronic device. Under Professor Howell's direction and Felix's organizational efforts, the behind-the-scenes team for King Lemuel's Treasure was coming together. Then Annie swallowed hard. Glancing around the room, she

realized all of the members of the Hook and Needle Club had been addressed but one. It was her turn next.

7

"Do I have the pleasure of addressing Mrs. Dawson?" Professor Howell asked looking directly at Annie.

Annie smiled and stood up. "Yes, Professor Howell. I'm Annie Dawson."

"Mrs. Brickson tells me you like to solve mysteries."

Annie didn't quite know what to say about that. That's the last thing she would have expected Stella to tell a stranger about her. She

replied slowly, "Well, it has happened on occasion that I've stumbled across certain things that have raised some questions or problems, and those have needed to be solved or resolved. I really don't go out of my way to look for mysteries, if that's what you want to call them. I do seem to have an ability to notice little details that others sometimes overlook, and that often turns out to be the key to finding answers."

"It's an interesting talent to have both a knack for paying attention to details that might not seem

important to other people, and to be able to put them together to come to a conclusion that satisfactorily answers, as you say, questions or problems," said the professor. "The reason I ask about this is that the job of prompter, for which Mrs. Brickson has recommended you, isn't as easy as it might sound. It's not just a matter of reading along with the play as the actors say their lines and then producing the missing words when they stumble. The prompter keeps a keen eye on the

action as it unfolds and is a good listener who has an unusual ability to keep pace with the flow of the play. That 'flow' is all-important. It keeps the audience engaged in the story, and if it is broken, the play suffers. An actor should not appear to be struggling to remember his or her lines in front of the audience. A good prompter delivers that cue or those words in an almost musical way, just the moment before the 'beat' of the 'music' moves on. If you succeed at this, as I hope you will, it will be by noticing the details, by knowing this play like it

was your favorite song. I'll expect you to attend every rehearsal, watching the actors practice their scenes again and again, and you will need to read the play many times. Do you think you can do that?"

Annie said yes, but she felt a little overwhelmed. It sounded intense. In her mind, she asked herself again, What have I gotten myself into?

Annie thought the meeting was ready to wind down, but the professor had more to tell them.

"I'm going to give each of you a small packet of papers I want you to read and study." That was Felix's cue to reach into his box again and pull out a stack of papers. He passed them around the room as the professor continued to speak. "This is something that I give to all my beginning students, to help them acclimate themselves with the basics. In particular, I want you to learn the special terminology we in the theater use. You should understand terms like stage right, stage left, upstage, backstage, proscenium, grid, and so on. If I ask

you to sit in the house, please do not go home—I'm simply telling you to sit in the area where the audience sits." There was light laughter among those seated around the table.

"By the way, everyone," the professor continued as Felix moved among them, "this is Felix Bordman, my right-hand man, who will also be acting as our stage manager."

Felix made a small bow, but said nothing, and the professor didn't ask him to describe his job, but

took on that task himself. "The stage manager's duties involve organizing and scheduling. He keeps an up-to-date production calendar with all the deadlines and rehearsals and performance dates that we need be aware of. Besides that, he is in charge of the master script and keeps notes about all the changes that occur during rehearsals, whether it's to the script or the lighting or anything else. It's a huge responsibility, but Felix is up to it." Annie thought the professor sounded as if he was referring to Felix with some amount of

affection, though he really didn't seem to treat him very well. Felix didn't seem to mind, but since she didn't know either of them very well, she decided to reserve judgment on that.

"And now I want to present to you a former student of mine and our playwright, Jacob Martin." The professor applauded, and the others joined in. As Jacob stood up to speak, the professor took his seat for the first time since the meeting began.

Jacob did seem a little shy, as

Kate had said, as if he didn't often speak before groups of people and didn't really care much for being in the spotlight. His tone of voice was low and soft, but nevertheless his words came out clearly. "I just want to thank you all for being here today, and for being willing to be involved in such a huge undertaking, even though most of you have very little experience in the theater. As you may know, my wife, Ophelia, died of breast cancer last year. She was the love of my life, and I owe everything that I am to her—and I don't just mean my

livelihood, though it was because she believed in me and encouraged me to become a playwright that I can call myself that today. But it wasn't that really; it was that she was an example to me every day of what a good and kind person should be. She was an individual of immense courage too. She was the inspiration for the play, but I wanted it to be something that would benefit other women in the future. I look at our daughter, and I pray that she will never have to go through the same ordeal as her

mother. So, I thank you again for volunteering your time and talents.”

With that, Jacob sat back down in his chair. The professor stood and made a short speech that was designed to inspire them, but to Annie, that was unnecessary. Jacob's few words didn't have the flair of his former teacher's, but they were modest, heartfelt, and to the point. It was Jacob's speech that had finally reminded Annie why she had become involved with the play. With all that had happened, between Mary Beth's very personal news, and discovering the tapestry,

and then this meeting with Professor Howell, she had momentarily lost sight of the goal. She decided that she would remind herself of that goal every day. If she became discouraged, she might stumble, but she wouldn't fall—at least not to the point that she couldn't get up again.

Apart from rereading the play several times and taking notes, Annie's participation in the production of the play would really

not begin in earnest until rehearsals started. That wasn't true for the other members of the Hook and Needle Club. The others were busier than they had ever been. The next Tuesday-morning meeting was too soon for all of what they had taken on to sink in, but by the following week, things were in full swing. Though they continued to work on their current needlework projects at the hour-long meeting, the conversation was taken up with reports of what they had accomplished in their individual tasks for the play so far.

Mary Beth had contacted Professor Torres at the college and had begun making phone calls among her musician friends in Stony Point to see if any of them would be willing to volunteer and to find out when they could begin practice sessions.

Peggy was excited that her sister, Mitzy, was going to be working on the play as well. Mitzy, too, had been given books and assignments to learn about hair and makeup for the theater. Peggy had already begun learning the part of Abigail.

She only had a few lines in the play, but by the measure of her enthusiasm, she could have been the star. Peggy was nearly always a bubbly personality, but combined with not having to worry about finances that winter with the steady income of Wally's position, and having been given the opportunity to stretch her wings doing something that she loved, she was extra happy, and that happiness seemed to stream from every pore of her being. Emily's dance recital had gone very well, and the others teased Peggy that she was another

budding superstar in the family.

Kate had been busily studying and sketching ideas for costumes in her free time, and she showed the others the worksheet that Vanessa had developed on the computer. It had spaces for an actor's body measurements and shoe size, along with an area to list every bit of clothing and accessories his or her character would require. Vanessa had printed out enough copies of the worksheet so that there was one for each actor. Kate had also contacted several ladies from

church, including Reverend Wallace's wife, June, to see if she could enlist them as seamstresses when it came time to produce the actual costumes.

Professor Howell had arranged for Kate to meet with the two college girls, Sarah and Vera, who would also be working on the costumes. So, after Vanessa got out of school one afternoon, the two of them had driven over to Longfellow College. The professor had also arranged for the student actors who had been cast in the play to be present, so that they could be

measured for their costumes, and Kate would have a chance actually see the actors in order to make the designs fit them better.

"What did you think of them?" asked Peggy.

"They were a friendly bunch," said Kate. "There seemed to be a well-developed sense of camaraderie among them."

"Oh," said Peggy, looking a little concerned.

Kate looked at Peggy quizzically. "Isn't that a good thing?" she asked.

“Yes—it is a good thing. It’s just that if they’ve worked together a lot, for me, it will be like coming to a new school after the year has already started—you know, two or three weeks after it starts and everyone else is already in pairs or groups of friends, and you’re just sort of left out,” replied Peggy.

“Don’t worry, Peggy,” said Kate. “I don’t think they’re like that. They treated Vanessa and me like old friends. They’re very casual and not snobbish at all.” Kate continued, “I am a little concerned about when we’re going to get to meet Dolores

and Cyril Fortescue. I can do outline sketches for their costumes, but without measurements and without being able to actually have an idea of their body shapes and sizes, it will be hard to nail down the designs."

Apparently, neither Professor Howell nor Stella were sure when the Fortescues would be returning from a trip to Florida, where they had gone to escape some of the winter weather. Annie hoped they would be back before the first rehearsal, for Kate's sake. As the

other members of the club continued chatting, Kate asked Peggy to stand to one side of the comfy circle of chairs so she could take Peggy's measurements and get them written down, as it wasn't always possible for Peggy to get away from work during the day.

Gwen related that several new sponsors had been signed up. She also showed the group the artwork that one of the college students had already completed and that Professor Howell had approved for the cover of the program. She had contacted a couple of different

printers to get quotes on printing the posters. They needed to get those out in the surrounding areas to make people aware of the play, even though the first performance was a few months away. "The professor suggested that we might start a Facebook page too," said Gwen. "I guess I'm going to have to catch up on all this new technology. It does sound like it would be a good way to reach a lot of people."

Stella had exciting news in her capacity as producer of the play. "When we began the Cultural

Center project, we received funds from the Maine Arts Commission. When it was decided that we would produce the play, I immediately sent in forms requesting a grant, and though the funds won't be available right away, it looks like we will be receiving some assistance."

"That's wonderful news, Stella," said Alice. "And I'm really glad to hear that everyone is coming along with their assignments so well. I can report that I've spent most of my free time reading the books that Professor Howell gave to me. I

made a few general sketches that I brought to the meeting with the professor, Wally, and Carl Johnson last Friday at the Cultural Center. Carl took my drawings to work up a computer model, and then he and the professor will tweak it to make it look the way that they want. Carl's going to be designing everything structural—the walls, the doors, the windows, and so on, and I'll be filling in the decorative details. Apparently, the computer program Carl uses even has the capability to work out a detailed

materials list, so that should be really helpful to Wally."

"Wally was impressed with him," said Peggy, her arms stretched out to each side as Kate measured the circumference above the bustline under her arms. "He said that Carl really understands about construction and woodworking. He gave Wally some good tips about placing the heavy-duty tools in the shop to make it more efficient."

"That's great," said Alice. She sighed deeply. "I'm still a little nervous about everything. I look at Carl, and he's so young and so well-

educated in his field. He knows all this computer stuff and seems to know everything about set design. He's really a nice young man. I guess I'm just a little intimidated. I wonder if I can measure up."

Annie reached out and patted her friend's shoulder. "Seriously, Alice, you have the talent to do this. You have a wonderful eye for what works and what doesn't. There's no reason for you to have a crisis of confidence. Just do your best—that's all any of us can do."

Stella said, "Professor Howell

would not have given the go-ahead if he didn't think you could do it—remember that. He told me himself that he was impressed with all our little group had to offer to the play. And that's after years of experience as an actor before he started teaching at the college."

"He was an actor too?" asked Peggy.

"Yes. It's been many years ago now," answered Stella. "In his middle years he decided he wanted something a little more stable than going from one acting job to the next, so he went back to graduate

school. He's taught the theater arts at Longfellow for a long time now."

"I can imagine him as a young man on the stage," said Kate. "With jet-black hair, just the opposite of what he has now, and about forty pounds lighter, he must have been quite a hunk in his day—what do you think?"

The others laughed, but Stella didn't look all that amused. "I think he's quite an attractive man as he is," she said. Looking down at her knitting, she got a puzzled look on her face. She must have dropped a

stitch because she started ripping out her last row. That never happened to her.

Fortunately for Stella, Alice chose to change the subject at that moment. She started by clearing her throat. "There is something else I need to talk to you about, Annie," Alice said, as she looked at Annie sideways with a bit of a grimace. "I know you haven't made a final decision yet, but I mentioned the tapestry to Professor Howell, and he'd like to see it." She paused and then added really quickly, "I also might have said that he could come

over to Grey Gables to see it—if you don't mind, that is. That way he could see the other things we found for props too. But I can tell him that he can't come over if you'd rather he didn't. I'm really sorry I didn't ask you first, but I just sort of got carried away."

Annie smiled at her friend, "It's all right, Alice. It will be fine for him to come over to the house to see the tapestry, and the other things as well," said Annie. "I'm still not sure if I want to let the tapestry be used in the production, but it can't

hurt for him to see it in any case."

Alice looked relieved. "Thanks, Annie. I just really want to be able to do a good job on this, and right now I'm feeling a bit overwhelmed."

"I know how you feel, Alice," said Annie. "At the meeting in the conference room at the Cultural Center, I felt the same way. It caused me to forget why we are doing this in the first place. It was Jacob's heartfelt speech that brought back to me what it's all about. I think if we all focus on the goal—raising money for breast cancer research—we can get

through this. And I think it can still be fun if we approach it with the right attitude."

"I agree," said Mary Beth. "I'm learning how important attitude is in everything. But even though I know that, it isn't always easy to keep a good attitude." Everyone knew that she was talking about more than just the play. "When we have the volunteers from Stony Point that we need for the music ensemble, it will involve driving over to the college to practice in one of the music department's

practice rooms at least a couple of evenings a week. So, it's going to be hectic for a lot of people. Fortunately, we can carpool and take turns driving, but" Her words trailed off and she sighed and said, "I still haven't heard back about my test results, and I don't know how to plan ahead. I hate to say I can play with the group and then have to pull out at some point."

"Did you talk to Professor Torres about your situation?" asked Gwen.

"No. She's very nice, but it just feels a little too personal to go

into," replied Mary Beth.

"I'd tell her, if I were you," said Gwen. "You don't have to go into great detail. Just tell her that you might have to take some time off if you aren't feeling well. I'm sure she'd understand, especially if there are other flutists."

"I think there will be at least a couple others who play the flute among the students who are volunteering."

"Why don't you wait until you get back the test results," suggested Annie. "There may be no reason to

tell her anything.”

“That’s a good point,” agreed Gwen.

Kate had just finished rolling up her tape measure, and Peggy had sat back down in her chair. Kate walked over and gave her boss and good friend a hug across the shoulders. “You’ve always shown me how to have a good attitude when I was low. I think it’s a good idea to wait for the test results before you say anything to Professor Torres, but no matter what the outcome is, I think you should go ahead and take part in

the practice sessions. You love to play, and it will do you good to focus on something else for a while. Don't take yourself out of the game before you've even begun."

8

Alice had arranged for the professor to come to Grey Gables to see the tapestry the following Saturday afternoon. Late that morning, Alice came over to help Annie get all of the props set up for viewing, including moving the kitchen table and chairs so they could roll out the large area rug that had contained the tapestry on the kitchen floor. They also moved furniture in the living room so that the tapestry could be laid out

across the carpet. In the dining room, Annie covered the table with a sturdy cloth, and they arranged various baskets, pottery, and a few other items they had found in the attic. Kate and Vanessa had taken most of the fabric and clothing they had found for the costumes home with them, but there were a few pieces of cloth that Alice had kept for use in the set design. In the library, Annie had earlier set up her grandmother's embroidery frame, and there was also a trunk from the attic that the ladies had carried downstairs that evening, more than

two weeks earlier, when they had discovered the tapestry.

After that evening, Annie had decided the best place to keep the tapestry was in one of the extra upstairs bedrooms; it was the only place she could think of where it would be safe and out of the way. She laid it, loosely folded over once, so it would fit atop the queen size bed and placed the muslin as a covering over the top of it instead of struggling to get it back into its protective pocket. Then Annie had securely closed the door to keep

Boots from wreaking havoc with it.

Before Annie and Alice brought the tapestry downstairs to lay it out on top of its muslin pocket across the living-room floor, Annie had shut Boots up in the mudroom off the back of the kitchen. She made sure there was a soft cushion on the floor, fresh water and a bowl full of kibble. The mudroom was where Annie kept the litter box, so Boots was set, except for the fact that she was very unhappy. If Annie was in the kitchen she would occasionally see Boots's paw sweep under the closed door, as if she

were expecting to nab Annie and pull her over to do her will. Then, when that didn't work, she meowed, making the most mournful sound she possibly could. It did tug at Annie's heart a bit, but it didn't convince her to trust that Boots would behave herself. She'd ended up with too many mangled balls of yarn that way, and she wasn't about to risk the tapestry just to please a cat who seemed to think she owned the place.

Before noon, Alice left to meet with the professor at the restaurant

in Maplehurst Inn on Main Street for lunch. Alice had originally suggested meeting at The Cup & Saucer, but the professor didn't seem to think it had "the right ambience," so she had reserved a quiet table near the back of the restaurant where they could talk about the set design for the play without being disturbed. Alice told Annie she thought they would be coming to Grey Gables to see the tapestry and the other props by about one o'clock.

Annie finished her own lunch and sat crocheting in the living room

while she waited for them to arrive. It was getting close to one-thirty when she heard the sound of a car pulling into her driveway. She looked up and out through the window and saw Alice's sporty Mustang parked behind her own classic Malibu. Another car pulled up behind Alice's car. It was a really impressive luxury car—a silver, four-door Mercedes-Benz Coupe. At first, Annie wondered why there were two cars, but then she stood up, and she could see that there were more people than she was

expecting.

Alice got out of the car quickly and was headed toward the house. From the front passenger-side seat of Alice's car there arose a tall, blond-haired, young man that Annie had never seen before. Then she recognized Felix as he clambered out of the Mustang's tiny back seat. Professor Howell, in his cashmere coat and wearing a stylish Stetson hat, stepped out of the driver's side of the Mercedes and walked around to the passenger side to open the door. It was Stella who got out of the front seat. After she was out of

the car, and he had closed the door, the professor offered his arm to her, which she accepted.

At the same time, the back door of the Mercedes that faced Annie opened, and a tall, distinguished-looking man got of the car. Then he leaned over to offer his hand to a woman with short white-gray hair who had scooted across the seat in order to get out of the car on the same side. The man and woman were considerably older than Annie—perhaps not Stella's age, but not much younger than her either;

Annie guessed they might be closer in age to Professor Howell. She had never seen them before, but she had a feeling they might be the Fortescues.

Annie went to the front door and opened it, standing in the doorway with her arms crossed against the cold as she waited for her visitors to walk up the driveway and along the front walk that led to the porch. Alice reached Annie first, and with a contrite look on her face she said quietly, "I'm sorry! I didn't know that the others were going to show up. Fortunately, there was plenty of

room in the restaurant. I'm glad we arranged to meet there instead of The Cup & Saucer! I just couldn't say no when they all wanted to come over here to see the tapestry."

"Don't sweat it, Alice," Annie said, reverting to the slang they had used as teenagers during her summer visits to Stony Point. "I really don't mind." She smiled reassuringly.

Felix and the other young man were close on Alice's heels; the people from the Mercedes were

taking their time coming across the driveway, which had been shoveled, but retained a layer of hardpacked snow. Alice took that time to introduce the young men. "Annie, you know Felix, of course." Felix was apparently a man of few words even when he wasn't in the presence of Professor Howell. He simply nodded once at Annie, pausing to push his glasses back up his nose afterward. Alice continued to introduce the other young man. "And this is Stacy Lewis, the actor who will be playing the part of King Lemuel in the play. Stacy, this is

Annie Dawson."

Annie's first impression of the young actor was that he was simply gorgeous.

"Nice to meet you, Mrs. Dawson," said Stacy, flashing a mouthful of pearly white teeth and reaching out to shake her hand.

She took his hand and said, "Nice to meet you too. Please call me Annie. Come on in out of the cold."

By then, the others were climbing the steps onto Grey Gables's porch. "Please come inside where it's warm," said Annie. Once they were

all inside in the main hallway, she closed the door and turned to introduce herself. "Hello, I'm Annie Dawson. Welcome to Grey Gables."

Stella took over the introductions. "Annie, I'd like you to meet dear friends of mine, Dolores and Cyril Fortescue. Of course, you know Professor Howell."

"Nice to see you again, Professor," said Annie. "And I'm pleased to meet you, Mr. and Mrs. Fortescue. Here, let me take your coats."

The Fortescues were friendly and gracious, and insisted that Annie

call them by their first names since they would all be working together on the play. Cyril spoke with a British accent that sounded like the "upstairs" variety of some Masterpiece Theater drama, and Dolores's accent was more like Annie had gotten used to hearing all around her in Maine. She thought that Dolores must be a native of the state. With all of the formalities out of the way, Annie explained how she and Alice had set up the props in different rooms and asked the professor where he

wanted to begin.

“Well, I think we’d all like to see this tapestry we’ve been hearing about from Mrs. MacFarlane,” said the professor, who continued to insist on using surnames. Annie supposed it was his way of keeping the distance needed to maintain his authority as the director—and with his students as their professor.

“Yes, it sounds lovely,” said Dolores. “Cyril and I love art and antiques. This piece sounds unique and interesting.”

“Very well then,” said Annie. “It’s just over here in the living room. It

might be a little crowded for all of us. Alice, maybe you could show Felix and Stacy into the library, and then they can see the tapestry after this group is finished."

Annie's four guests lined up along the bottom edge of tapestry to gaze upon it, hardly saying a word for several minutes. Annie stood off to the side, and she was in a position to study Dolores and Cyril while they studied the it.

Cyril Fortescue was very tall and lanky. His hair was silvery gray and thick, and his eyes were a dusky

blue color. His pleasant expression changed very little, as if he was completely unperturbed by the world around him. He was wearing blue jeans and a blue denim shirt under a dark gray wool sport jacket. He was still a very handsome man, and Annie could imagine him playing the romantic lead in his younger years.

Dolores Fortescue was pixielike. The tip of her small nose turned up just slightly, and her blue eyes seemed to have an inner sparkle. The style of her hair only served to accentuate Annie's impression of

her—it was cut in layers that ended just above chin-length, with her ears peaking out behind the strands that brushed her cheeks, revealing dangly copper-colored earrings. She had a petite figure, and she was wearing jeans like her husband, but with a soft, pink gingham-print oxford-style blouse. She had been wearing a sweater, but in the warmth of Grey Gables she had taken it off and tied the arms around her neck. She looked up at Annie just then and caught Annie watching her, but she just smiled

and gave Annie a quick wink, and then looked back down at the tapestry.

"I can see why Mrs. MacFarlane is so excited about this," said the professor. "It's quite remarkable. I agree with her that it would be a perfect backdrop in the great hall set. But I understand you have some misgivings about our using it?" he asked, looking at Annie.

"Well, yes," said Annie. "I admit I'm hesitant. You see, my grandmother was a great friend to many people in her long life, and she would often store things for

them in the attic. In her later years, I think that Grey Gables just became too much for her to handle, though I didn't realize it at the time. It was only when I returned to Stony Point after her death that I could see that it had been a struggle, and that she could have used my help, even though she never asked for it. I wish I had been more thoughtful. But the point is that there are things in the attic that might not necessarily be mine to dispose of as I please. Yes, the house is mine, but it's just not

always so clear-cut for me when it comes to things from the attic—especially when it comes to something like this. I want to be true to my grandmother's spirit of friendship, and I want to be sure that the things that are up there end up in the right hands."

"I think I understand your reservations," said the professor, "but surely it can do no harm for us to use it, very carefully mind you. Perhaps we can work it out so that it is only on stage for the dress rehearsals and the actual performances. That should mitigate

the chances of anything happening to it. Please consider what the addition of this fine work of art could mean to the play."

Annie decided. "All right. I'll agree to that. I'll check around and see what I can find out about the best way to display it and anything else I might need to do to protect it. Molly Williams over at Expert Cleaners is pretty knowledgeable about all things having to do with taking care of any sort of cloth. She may be able to offer some suggestions."

“I have some friends in the fine arts and antique businesses who might be able to offer some advice too,” said Cyril, “and if you should decide you’d like to sell it, be sure to let me know. I have contacts at all the big auction houses.”

Annie was caught off guard. It had never entered her mind to sell the tapestry. She just said, “Thank you, Cyril, but I don’t have any plans to sell the tapestry. But if you happen to have any good advice from your friends about storing and protecting it, I would appreciate it.”

“Very well,” said Cyril. His placid

demeanor seemed just a little ruffled, but there was nothing that Annie could do about it.

“Well, it certainly is lovely,” said Dolores. “I’ve never seen anything quite like it, except perhaps in Europe. Though, now that I think about it, it does remind me, in style at least, of the Unicorn Tapestries at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.”

“I agree,” said Cyril. “Whoever made this had a real understanding of the power of image. He or she has used a lot of iconic images to

add layers of meaning.”

“What do you mean?” asked Annie.

“Well, just take—for instance—the panel where the woman is gathering wool. The bush is a holly bush. Its red berries represent the blood of Christ, and its thorns the “crown” that was thrust upon Jesus’s head. In the background, the single lamb among the sheep—that is a way of representing Jesus with his Church,” said Cyril.

“That’s really interesting,” said Annie, seeing the tapestry in a whole new way. “How did you come

to know so much about this?"

"It's just something I've studied on my own," replied Cyril. "It's funny though; there was a time when people understood how to read images like these in a way that we've lost today."

"Why is that funny?" asked Stella.

"It's funny in an ironic way," said Cyril. "Here we are, in a culture in which we are surrounded, one might even say bombarded, by images, yet we often don't have the slightest idea of their power to influence us and couldn't tell you

the meaning of them if we were asked. We may talk about those 'poor illiterate people' of the Middle Ages, but let me tell you, they understood rituals and images, and they could read them like you and I can read books. We've lost that understanding to a large degree, in part because we've told ourselves that what we see every day doesn't affect us. In my opinion, we're only fooling ourselves."

"Well said," the professor interjected. "Though, as a professor at an institution of higher learning, I like to think that I convey to my

students the importance of the image—the way that they move on stage, and the costumes and the set, all these contribute to how we relay the meaning of the words to the audience.”

“I’ve no doubt that you do, Rudy,” said Cyril. “But one wonders how aware the audience is of the reasons they are affected by certain images, and sometimes I wonder if they know how much they are being manipulated.”

It took Annie a moment to realize who “Rudy” was. She’d never even

heard Stella refer to the professor in such a casual way. The professor himself seemed to take offense at Cyril's words. He made a huffing sound and said, "Perhaps that's what you learned at the Royal Academy, but at Longfellow, we—"

Stella cut off the professor, "Now, gentlemen, I think this is a discussion for another time."

"Of course, Mrs. Brickson," said the professor. He took a deep breath and shot a look at Cyril that, while not angry, wasn't exactly friendly either. Annie had the impression there was some history

between them. She wondered if they had known each other before—perhaps back in the days when the professor was an actor too. Dolores reached up and patted her husband on the shoulder, in a way Annie had seen her mother do when she thought Annie's father was getting a little too intense during a conversation.

Dolores tactfully changed the subject. "Annie, do you know what these letters represent?" She was pointing to the bottom corner under the scene of the reading woman.

“Besides the Roman numerals in the center, which represent the number 1966, not really,” said Annie. She began walking over toward the “Home Song” tapestry on the wall. “The letter panel on the large tapestry is almost like the letter panel on this small one, except this number is 1946.” As Annie explained that the small tapestry had been displayed in the same place since she was a child, she took it down from its place in the niche and laid it beside the reading-woman panel.

After studying it for a moment,

Dolores asked, "So the 'Home Song' tapestry has been displayed in this house as long as you can remember, but you had never set eyes on the large tapestry before a couple of weeks ago?" She didn't really expect an answer, so she continued. "It seems very odd that your grandmother kept it in the attic. Of course, there's really no place here to hang something this large in a home, but why not donate it to a museum so it could be appreciated?"

"That's one reason that makes

me wonder about it," said Annie. "She may have been asked to store it, so she might not have felt like it was hers to do with as she pleased."

"Do you have any ideas about the 'L.C.' on each end?" asked Cyril.

"No," Annie admitted. "I really don't, and I'm not even sure where to start looking."

"If you like, I can make some inquiries," said Cyril. "Would you mind if I took a few photographs?"

"Not at all," said Annie. "I'd appreciate any help I can get to discover the history behind this

tapestry, and the smaller one as well."

Cyril took his cellphone out of his pocket and began taking several pictures, having to take several consecutive shots to get it all in, and then he took close-ups of each scene as well.

"Now that we've got this all settled," said the professor, "what else have you got to show us, Mrs. Dawson?"

9

When they had finished looking over all of the other props, Annie invited them all to stay for a cup of tea and a slice of pound cake, which Alice had baked and brought over that morning. They thanked her, but had to refuse since the Fortescues had an engagement that evening and had to get home. Annie was glad to have met Dolores and Cyril. She liked them, even if she had rankled Cyril a bit by saying that she wouldn't consider selling

the tapestry. Now she was really getting excited for rehearsals to begin so that she could see them in action on the stage.

The discussions about the play were only peripheral while they looked at the props, and no one had mentioned Jacob's name. She had liked Jacob too. She couldn't imagine what could have caused a falling out between the Fortescues and their son-in-law. For their sakes, and for Jacob's daughter's sake, she hoped it could be worked out.

Alice had to leave with the others

so that she could return Felix and Stacy to Main Street where Felix had parked his car. Alice promised to return as soon as she could get away to help Annie put her house back together.

Only about half of the things the professor had seen for the set had gotten his approval, but he had liked the carpet and the trunk, so Annie was going to arrange for Wally to come by with his pickup truck on Monday to transport them to the Cultural Center. The smaller things, Alice and Annie decided to

deliver themselves the following week. The tapestry would stay where it was in Annie's house for the time being, at least until they figured out how to display it properly. Then, when that was settled, Professor Howell suggested they bring the tapestry over the Cultural Center to store it in one of the empty offices on the fourth floor where he said it surely would be safe.

Annie decided to go ahead and return the tapestry to the upstairs bedroom so that she could release Boots from her confinement in the

mudroom. The conversation with the Fortescues about the tapestry set her mind to working on the problem of learning who had made it and who it might belong to if it didn't belong to her grandmother. The clues were slim—two years, 1946 and 1966, and "L.C.," which were either someone's initials, or some sort of abbreviation, or maybe both. She wondered how on earth she could ever figure it out.

As she leaned across the bed to arrange the muslin covering over the tapestry on the bed, she lifted

one leg behind her to help maintain her balance and her foot bumped the edge of the closet door, causing it to slowly open with a creaky sound. She'd often had trouble with that particular doorknob staying latched, and she was a bit annoyed when she turned around to close it. Then something caught her eye. The upper shelf of the closet was filled with different-size boxes of letters that her grandmother had saved. Betsy Holden was a prolific letter writer, and she saved every letter she had ever received. Annie knew the boxes of letters were

there, but as often happens—out of sight, out of mind. Now she thought to herself, I wonder ...

It was a long shot, but what if there was something in one of the letters about the tapestry? There were a lot of letters, and it might take a long time to go through them, but where else did she have to start? Betsy had marked the boxes with the years in which the letters had been received in five-year increments. Annie got a chair to stand on and began looking for a box marked 1946–1950; she found

it and set it down on the floor. Then she climbed back up on the chair and rummaged some more until she found another box marked 1966–1970. She took the two boxes and sat them on the floor in the hallway. Then she went back in the bedroom to close the closet door very gingerly, willing it to stay latched. When she thought she had it, she closed the door to the bedroom and carried one box down to the living room and set it in one corner.

Her next step was to release Boots from the mudroom. She tried

to make up with Boots, but Boots gave her the cold shoulder and bounded up the main staircase to go and pout. When Annie went up to get the second box of letters, she saw that Boots had already made herself comfortable in the center of Annie's bed and appeared to be napping. Annie knew that when the persnickety cat got hungry, she would once again be Annie's best friend.

Annie deposited the box of letters in the living room next to the other one and then decided she would do

what she could until Alice returned to help her. She began by carrying the props that hadn't been approved up the staircase and placing them by the attic door so she could put them back in the attic later.

After several trips up and down the stairs, she heard the doorbell ring. Alice had gone home first to change into more comfortable clothes since she had dressed up a bit to meet with the professor. Once again she shed her boots in the hallway and slipped on the house shoes she had carried along.

“You know,” said Annie. “Instead of carrying those back and forth, why don’t you just leave them here?”

“That would be a good idea,” said Alice, “if you don’t mind—at least in the winter. What shall we do first?”

They decided to return the kitchen to its proper condition first, so they rolled up the carpet again and took it into the library, and then they moved the table and chairs back into position. Next they moved the living-room furniture

back to its proper placement. Then they went into the dining room to pack up the smaller props in boxes for transport over to the Cultural Center.

“So, tell me about your luncheon,” said Annie as they worked. “When did you realize that it wasn’t going to be just you and the professor?”

“I didn’t have any warning at all—I had all my notes and sketches laid out on the table so we could discuss them while we waited for our food after we ordered, but when the professor and Stella and

the Fortescues showed up all together, I just put them away. Then, about fifteen minutes later, Felix and Stacy walked in the door. Apparently, the Fortescues had come to see Stella at her house, and the professor had stopped by unexpectedly to drop off some invoices for stuff for the play. When he told them about coming over here to see the tapestry, they were all interested, so he invited them to lunch. Felix told me in the car on the way over here that he got a text from the professor telling him

to round up Stacy and bring him to Maplehurst Inn as soon as possible. Felix didn't even know why; he just did what he was told to do. I'd guess that Professor Howell wanted Stacy to come over to Stony Point with Felix so he could meet the Fortescues, since they are the three principal actors in the play. Actually, we really didn't talk much about King Lemuel's Treasure. The whole point of the meeting was supposed to have been an opportunity for me to learn more about the professor's vision of the play, but with everyone else there, it just didn't

happen. It was fun to meet the Fortescues though. They're a really interesting couple, and they're so cute together. You'd think they were still in their twenties sometimes."

Annie smiled. "I liked them too." She paused and said, "That poor fellow—Felix, I mean. He seems to be at the professor's beck and call. Thing is, he really doesn't seem to mind. At least not that I've seen."

"He's a good guy, I think," said Alice. "Stacy did most of the talking in the car, but every now and then

Felix would say a word or two, and I don't think he said anything at the restaurant. He's naturally quiet, but I think he likes being the organizer."

"And what was Stacy like?" asked Annie. "I didn't really have a chance to talk to him."

"Very nice—like Kate said at the Hook and Needle Club meeting—friendly, not at all snobbish. He was easy and open over lunch with the Fortescues. They seemed to get along very well. Of course, you saw how handsome he is. If he can act even a little bit, I predict he'll have

a really great career," said Alice.

"Remember the crush we had on Dr. Gannon on Medical Center?" asked Annie.

"Oh my gosh! How could I forget?" said Alice, laughing. "We took over your grandparents' TV set every Wednesday night at nine o'clock!"

"Except for the blond hair, I thought Stacy was a dead ringer for Chad Everett," said Annie.

"I didn't think of that," said Alice, squinting her eyes as she tried to conjure up his face in her memory,

"but I think you're right. How could I have missed that? Well, if we can get the teenage girl demographic to show up to the play as faithfully as we watched that show, I'd say we're in pretty good shape to make a lot of money for breast cancer research!"

When Annie and Alice had finished putting everything away, they sat down in the kitchen to relax with a cup of tea and some of the pound cake Alice had made.

"Shame that the others couldn't stay for tea," said Annie. "This cake is so good. It tastes like lemon and

almond—is that right?”

“You hit the nail on the head,” said Alice. After another bite, Alice asked, “So what did you think about the Fortescues?”

“Like you said, they seemed very nice, and interesting—both of them,” said Annie. “I thought what Cyril had to say about the tapestry was fascinating. It really makes me want to find out as much as I can about it. After the play is over, I can’t just put it back in the attic. That would just be wrong. I did have a bit of a brainstorm earlier.”

Alice raised her eyebrows. "Knowing you, that could be a good thing, or it could be a bad thing."

"Well, harrumph!" said Annie. "You really can't say that I've ever come up with a bad idea, can you?"

"Remember that time when we just took off and walked all the way down past Butler's Lighthouse to Edge Cove when we were supposed to be weeding the garden, and then we got in trouble with Betsy?" said Alice. "That was your idea."

"OK. Maybe that one time," said Annie. "That was pretty stupid really. I think she must have been

worried to death when she couldn't find us. But I think you have to admit that it was usually your brainstorm that got us into trouble."

"I think we're getting off track here," said Alice. "Tell me your idea."

"Nice way to change the subject, Alice," said Annie, "but I'll let you get away with it this time. My thought was that I could go through Gram's old letters and see if I can find any mention of a tapestry."

"I think that's worth a try," said

Alice. "I wish I could help you out, but between work and the play, I just don't have a lot of free time these days. This is the first time in days that I've eaten something without having my nose in a book at the same time—well, this time and at the restaurant."

"That's OK," said Annie. "I'll probably just go through a few packs at a time in the evenings. Fortunately, Gram did have some organization; she kept letters from the same year all together, tied up with string or ribbon, so if I find a letter that mentions the tapestry, it

should be pretty easy to follow the trail through the years—at least I hope it will. The trick will be to find it in the first place. There are over a dozen boxes of letters in the closet upstairs—or at least there were before I brought two of them down here. Granted, they aren't all the same size. After the 1980s, the boxes got smaller and smaller."

"Yeah, letter writing is a lost art, I think. I was never any good at it, but it's such a lovely idea—you know to have monogrammed stationery, and beautiful cursive

handwriting. My grandmother had beautiful writing, and my mother's isn't bad, but frankly, mine is terrible. I think it must be that the expectations changed. When our grandmothers were learning, you had to write a certain way, and you practiced until you were good at it. By the time I went to school, it was all about 'self-expression.' I usually think that's a good thing, but I have to admit, there are some things that require a certain degree of conformity, for communication's sake if nothing else. Even individual expression needs a foundation.

What's the point of expressing yourself if no one else can tell what you're writing or saying?" Alice sighed. "Of course, it's not like I couldn't buckle down and learn to do it if I really wanted to. I just don't take the time, and now with computers and email, I don't really have to. I don't really have any right to rant about it." Alice smiled and raised her right hand with her index finger pointing up and said, "But one of these days—mark my words—I'm going to do it. Maybe when I'm retired. I mean, I'm going

to work on my cursive writing and start writing letters.”

Annie laughed. “I’ll believe it when I see it. Not that I don’t think you can do it. But you know what Gram would say—‘there’s no time like the present,’ and ‘don’t put off until tomorrow what you can do today.’”

“I hate it when you’re right,” said Alice. “How ‘bout this: As soon as the play is finished, I’m going to start practicing my handwriting skills until I have beautiful calligraphy.”

“Can I have that in writing?” said

Annie.

They both laughed as Alice took her plate and tea cup and saucer over to the kitchen sink. "Well, I hate to eat and run, but I'd better head back to the carriage house. I have a pile of paperwork for Divine Décor and Princessa."

When Alice left to go home, it was already starting to get dark. Annie locked the door and fastened the safety latch. She liked the quiet sometimes, but now she felt like listening to music. Because of the play and its connection to the

Middle Ages, she had recently ordered two new CDs of medieval-style music off the Internet, and they had only arrived the day before, so she hadn't had a chance to listen yet. One was by a group called the Tallis Scholars singing Palestrina. Annie hadn't read the liner notes yet, so she wasn't sure who or what that was, but the samples she listened to on the Internet sounded beautiful. The other CD was by a group called Anonymous 4 performing a collection of songs written by a 12th-century nun named Hildegard

von Bingen for the Feast of St. Ursula. It wasn't her usual fare, but she thought it might be nice to try something different. She put in the CD with the songs by the nun and pressed "play," and then she moved the 1946–1950 letter box to the coffee table and sat down on the sofa.

The voices on the CD were beautiful and haunting, and put her in an unusual frame of mind as she picked up the first bundle of letters and checked the postmark on the top letter to see which year this

bundle contained. It wasn't the one she wanted, but after checking a couple more bundles, she found the one with 1946 postmarks. There was nothing to do but start reading, so she opened the first letter and began.

Two hours later, she had been through about half of the letters and had listened through both CDs. She decided it was time for a break. It had been interesting to read the letters, but she hadn't found anything that mentioned a tapestry. She went into the kitchen to warm up some chicken noodle soup for

dinner and munched on a saltine while she waited. Soon, she felt something brush along the side of her ankle. Sure enough, it was Boots; all was forgiven and her cat food bowl was almost empty. Annie knew she could depend on Boots's tummy to rule over her emotions. She reached down and scratched between Boots's ears and spoke to her soothingly, apologizing for the cat's earlier incarceration.

After Annie finished her soup and cleaned up the kitchen, she decided to get comfortable. She went

upstairs and changed into her flannel nightgown and bathrobe, and put on her crocheted slippers. She retrieved the book she was currently reading from her bedside table and took it downstairs with her. In the kitchen, she made herself a cup of chamomile tea and then took it and her book into the living room, intending to curl up on the sofa to read for a while. The room had gotten chilly, so she started a fire in the fireplace. Then she put the Anonymous 4 CD in the player again, turned the volume down low and pushed play. She

bunched up pillows on one end of the sofa and sat down, her legs stretched out across its length. For good measure, she covered her legs with the crocheted afghan she kept draped over the back of the sofa. She took a sip of tea and began reading.

The book was enjoyable, but as she read on through the evening, she slipped down further and further on the sofa. Soon she fell asleep with the open book on her chest and Boots curled up on top of her legs. She awoke with a start

when she heard the clock in the kitchen strike eleven o'clock.

"Oh, Boots," she said sleepily, "I didn't mean to fall asleep. Guess it would be a good idea to go to bed now."

Boots didn't stir, but Annie slipped her legs to the side, out from under the afghan and the cat, and stood up to stretch. The fire in the fireplace had gone out, and just a few red embers remained. As Annie reached down to pick up her tea cup and saucer from the coffee table, she saw the corner of an envelope on the floor, sticking out

from beneath the edge of the sofa. One of her grandmother's letters must have slipped out of the bundle, and Annie thought she must have inadvertently kicked it under the sofa when she was getting up or sitting down.

She picked up the envelope and checked the postmark. It was from May of 1946. Annie shivered. "Must be getting cold," she said aloud, but she really felt quite warm after her nap. It was late, so she started to put the letter back in the 1946 letter bundle, but something made

her stop. She looked at the return address. There was no name, only "Office 316, Wilson Hall, Longfellow College, Maine." Now she was hooked. Who did her grandmother know at Longfellow College in 1946? Annie opened the envelope and took out the letter and began reading: "Dear Betsy, I was very pleased and honored to have received in the mail this week the invitation to your wedding."

As Annie read, she felt like she was seeing another side of her grandmother that had been unknown to her. She'd had no idea

that Gram had taken college courses before she married Grandpa. She felt a little bit of an ache that she hadn't known her grandmother better. To her, she was just Gram—Annie loved her, but she had learned since she moved into Grey Gables that she had just scratched the surface when it came to knowing her grandmother.

When Annie reached the end of the letter, she breathed in sharply when she saw the signature: Lily Cornette. She cast a look back to

the top of the letter at the heading:
Longfellow College. May 7, 1946.
That's when it all came together for
her; she knew she had found what
she was looking for. In her mind's
eye Annie saw it: "L.C.~1946~
L.C."

10

Rehearsals for King Lemuel's Treasure were to begin the first week of February and would continue up until the first performance near the end of April. The rehearsals were scheduled three nights a week—Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays—and on Saturday afternoons. All the members of the Hook and Needle Club planned to be at the first rehearsal on Wednesday of that week since Professor Howell

wanted a word with everyone involved with the production. But the day before, at the club meeting held at A Stitch in Time, the play was not the main topic of conversation.

The main focus was on Mary Beth, who had been to see her oncologist to get her biopsy results the day before. Though Mary Beth could have easily driven herself to see the doctor, Alice insisted that she would drive. When the results were known, Alice and Mary Beth were both glad she had insisted. It wasn't long before all the members

of the club knew the results: The lump in her breast was a small tumor—and it was malignant.

After everyone had arrived, just before the Hook and Needle Club meeting began, Kate locked the front door of A Stitch in Time and turned the “Open” sign to the “Closed” side so that they wouldn’t be disturbed. Mary Beth was understandably emotional. Her worst fear was confirmed, and her friends consoled her. When she shed tears, so did they.

When Mary Beth was able, she

told them what the doctor had said would be her next step. She would have to undergo a lumpectomy, which meant that they would remove only the lump and not the entire breast. The doctor had told her that they would be inserting a radioactive dye into the breast and would use a Geiger counter to follow its progress through the breast and the lymph nodes in the armpit to determine if there were any more small lumps in the breast and if any of the lymph nodes would have to be removed. Her surgery was scheduled for that

Friday.

After her surgery, the tissues would be tested to determine what kind of cancer it was, and what stage it had reached. The doctor also told her that if the tumor was determined to be ER positive, that is, whether estrogen was causing the tumor to grow, it would be sent to a lab in California where they could do a special test to determine if that was the case and help develop the best course of treatment for Mary Beth. Only then would she know if she would have

to have chemotherapy or radiation or hormone therapy or some combination of the three.

"Would you like to go home today?" asked Kate. "I can handle everything here."

"No," said Mary Beth. "I need to be active. If I go home, I'm just going to sit around and feel sorry for myself." She looked at Annie. "Someone gave me some good advice recently. She said to put things in order, but then live in the present and let the future take care of itself, and that's what I'm going to do. I'm not going to lie to you;

you know that I'm scared. But I'm not going to just give up."

"Have you called your sister and your niece yet?" asked Gwen.

Mary Beth's sister, Melanie, a fashion designer, and Melanie's daughter, Amy, both lived in New York City. Mary Beth was close to Amy, but her relationship with her sister was complicated. For years the sisters' connection had been strained, but Melanie had helped Mary Beth during her purchase of the building that housed A Stitch In Time, and their relationship had

improved somewhat. Since Mary Beth's mother had died, Amy and Melanie were her only close family.

"I haven't called them yet," said Mary Beth. "I just wasn't ready last evening. I'll call each of them tonight, when I know that they are home from work."

"I'm sure they'll want to be here with you," said Gwen.

"Maybe Amy will be able to come," said Mary Beth. "But Melanie is getting ready for the spring fashion shows. I don't know if she'll have time."

"Well, then she should make

time,” said Stella, sounding a little bit outraged. “I’ll speak to her, if you like.”

“No, Stella, it’s OK,” said Mary Beth with a smile. “I think I’d rather just wait and see—if she comes, fine; if not, it’s also fine. Really.”

“If you say so,” said Stella. She didn’t look convinced, but she wanted to support Mary Beth, not add to her troubles.

“How long will you have to be in the hospital?” asked Peggy.

“Incredibly, at least to me, it will be what they call ‘24-hour

outpatient surgery,'" said Mary Beth. "I have to be there very early in the morning so they can inject the dye and see how it spreads, and then they mark the placement of the tumor for the doctor so he can do the surgery, but once it's done and the anesthesia has worn off, I should be able to go home."

"Even if Amy or Melanie can't come to Stony Point, you know that any of us that can will be there," said Alice.

"There's no need for all of you to be there," said Mary Beth. "But I will need someone to drive me

home, I'm sure. I'll let you all know what's going on after I talk to Melanie and Amy tonight. Thanks for all your love and support. You know how much I appreciate all of you, but now, if you don't mind, let's talk about something else."

After a lengthy pause, Peggy said, "Let's talk about the 'Proverbs 31 Woman' tapestry. I didn't get to hear everything that you said after church about the letter you found, Annie; we had to leave right after the service for a family dinner at Mitzy's house."

“I missed it too,” said Kate. “Vanessa wanted to get home fast so she could eat lunch and then could go tobogganing with some friends Sunday afternoon.”

Annie had brought the letter with her to the meeting so everyone could see it. Gwen read it first. “This looks pretty convincing to me, Annie,” said Gwen. “She writes about a “small gift” that she sent, and it’s the right year—at least for the small tapestry—and it’s the right initials.” She passed the letter on to Mary Beth.

“Did you check to see if there

were more letters to Betsy from her?" asked Alice.

"Not yet," answered Annie. "It was the middle of the night—at least for me—when I found this one, and I just haven't had a chance to go any further. What I might do is go to the 1966 bundle of letters first to see if there are any letters from Lily then."

Mary Beth passed the letter on to Peggy and said, "At least it's a place to start. That's more than you had before. You should be able to find out more about Lily from the

college, even if you don't find another letter. They would surely know if she was capable of making a tapestry like the ones you have."

"I'm hoping to go over to the campus one day in the next few weeks, though I'm not really sure who I should speak with once I get there," said Annie. "The important thing for me is to figure out what to do with it when the play is over."

"We'd be happy to display it over at the Cultural Center," said Stella.

"I've thought of that," said Annie. "It depends on what else I learn about it, but it's a better option

than anything else I have right now."

Peggy passed the letter to Alice. "The professor is really excited about using it in the play," said Peggy. "He stopped in at The Cup & Saucer yesterday morning, and I heard him talking on the phone about it."

"He was persuasive," said Annie. "I wasn't entirely ready to decide when he and everyone else came over to Grey Gables, but he was so enthusiastic. It was just impossible to refuse."

Alice passed the letter to Kate. "You have to admit," said Alice, "that it's perfect for the play. Did you find out any more about how to display it?"

"I stopped by to see Molly at Expert Cleaners this morning," said Annie. "She's going to do some investigation and let me know what she finds out. I think most of the antiques she deals with are clothing, so the tapestry is unique for her. She said she can't wait to see it."

Kate passed the letter on to Stella. "Molly is one of the people I

called to help with the costumes,” said Kate. “She’s so knowledgeable about historical clothing, and she’s a wonderful seamstress too. I’ve been really pleased with the response that I’ve gotten personally about helping with the play.”

“Me too,” said Gwen. “I’m sure you all saw the article about the play in The Point. I had only asked Mike Malone if I could take out an ad to ask for volunteers. He was the one that offered to write an article about the play, including the reason why the play was written

and that its purpose is to raise money for breast cancer research. And it was effective. I started getting calls from volunteers as soon as that issue came out.”

Annie looked over at Stella; she seemed to have finished reading the letter and was only staring at it. Her expression seemed distant and a little sad. Annie asked, “What is it, Stella? Do you know the writer of the letter?”

“No, I don’t think so,” said Stella. “It’s just seeing this, about Betsy and Charlie getting married. It brings up old memories—good and

bad. I should have been at their wedding, and I should have been happy for them, but I was too wrapped up in myself.”

They all knew the story of Stella’s jealousy and how it came between her and Betsy.

Annie reached out and put her hand over one of Stella’s. “It’s all in the past now, Stella, and I know it’s been forgiven. Don’t go beating yourself up over something that is over and done.”

“I know, Annie,” said Stella. “But I still wish I could go back and

change the past.” She sighed and closed the letter and gave it back to Annie. “I am glad to have had the chance to be a friend to Betsy’s granddaughter.”

“That makes me happy too,” said Annie.

The Cultural Center theater was abuzz the next evening. There were people standing in little groups on the stage, in the side aisles, and there were some making their way into the house from the lobby. From

her vantage point, Annie could see a couple of people backstage as well as they occasionally passed by a gap in the back curtain. There were others, like Annie, who had found a seat in the house and were waiting for something to happen. It wasn't that crowded, but the noise level was a little high, with people conversing and laughing; it was a pleasant sound, at least to Annie.

She was a little early, and she hadn't seen any of the other members of the Hook and Needle Club, but she recognized several people from Stony Point. There

were just as many that she didn't know, though, and she assumed many of them were students from the college who had also volunteered to help with the production. She watched and wondered how Professor Howell would ever get this rabble organized so that he could talk to them and then get the rehearsal underway.

She had been in the theater several times now; in fact, she'd made it to every event they had hosted so far—the classic movies,

the touring dance troupe, the Myra's School of Dance recitals, a travelogue about Glacier National Park in Montana, and a community Christmas program. It wasn't a huge theater, but for a town the size of Stony Point, she thought it was pretty impressive.

In the main theater area, the flooring of the third floor of the Walker Building had been removed to combine the second and third floor spaces to make a high ceiling, leaving columns and beams for support. The support features had been suitably disguised with

decorative architectural details, so it was hard to imagine the space had not always been as it presently was.

The ticket office had been placed on the main floor. To get to the lobby of the theater, there were stairs, but most people took the elevator that rose to the third-floor level where the floor had been left intact. There were two sets of doors from the lobby into the house, each one opening to an aisle that ran along the side of the central seating area, slanting down toward the

stage. Between the lobby doors was a glassed-in area where the control booth was located. The glass was black, so even when the house lights were down, it was nearly impossible to see inside the booth. Between the first row of seats and the stage, there was a flat, open area, and right in front of the stage was the orchestra pit. On each side of the proscenium there was an ornate Greek column; the curtains were a rich gold color.

While Annie was taking in her surroundings, she didn't notice at first that someone had sat down

beside her. "Good evening," said a deep voice very near to her.

Annie jumped a little. "Ian! You surprised me."

"Sorry about that," said Ian, smiling. "You're taking in all the sights, I see. Looks like a bit of a madhouse, but I'll bet Professor Howell will soon have everything under control."

"I'm sure you're right," said Annie. "Better him than me, that's for sure. The end of April isn't all that far off. Do you think we can get all of this together by the date

of the first performance?"

Ian didn't have a chance to answer since, as Annie was speaking, Wally, Peggy, and Emily had walked past and turned into the row just in front of them. Instead of sitting down, they turned around to face Annie and Ian. Wally reached out to shake hands with Ian, and they exchanged pleasantries. "Isn't this exciting?" Peggy asked. "Wally and Emily are just here for Professor Howell's speech, and then Wally's going to take Emily home. When we both have to be here, my mom said she

would watch Emily, so everything's going to work out well, I think. My boss wasn't thrilled when I told him I couldn't work Saturday afternoons for a couple of months, but when I told him the reason, he got onboard. Jeff's not really such a bad guy."

Ian laughed; he'd known Peggy's boss since high school and was inclined to agree that he wasn't always the gruff guy he pretended to be. Ian had been a resident of Stony Point all his life, and it was an advantage for him as mayor.

There weren't many people who could bluff their way around him. He'd known most of them too long to be fooled by outer appearances—and that worked both ways. The people of Stony Point knew that the man they had elected as mayor was a man to be trusted—even if he was a politician.

Annie and Ian chatted with the Carsons for a bit, and soon the other members of the Hook and Needle Club showed up and found seats close to Annie and Ian. Alice and Mary Beth took the seats on the other side of Annie, and Gwen,

Kate, and Vanessa sat behind them. Peggy's sister Mitzy came and sat down next to Peggy. John Palmer, Gwen's husband, had taken the seat next to Ian so they could talk. Annie took the opportunity to quietly ask Mary Beth if she had called her family.

"Yes," said Mary Beth. Annie thought it must have gone well because Mary Beth smiled. "I talked to both of them. I called Amy first, and she told me that Melanie was in Paris. Since it was the middle of the night over there, I called her

this morning. The good news is that Amy is going to come up to Stony Point tomorrow, and she's going to take me to the hospital and stay with me until Monday."

"That's wonderful news," said Annie. "What did Melanie say?"

"When I spoke to her on the phone, she didn't say very much. It was morning here, but it was the middle of the afternoon over there, so she was really busy." Then Mary Beth started to tear up, but she was still smiling. "But then this afternoon, Jenny Simons—I think you know her; she and her sister

Susan own the flower shop Flora & Fern—delivered a beautiful flower arrangement with a note from Melanie. The note said, "You're in my thoughts and prayers. Love, Melanie." Mary Beth reached in her purse for a tissue. "It was just the sweetest thing. She's never done anything like that before. It meant a lot to me."

At that moment, Gwen said in a voice just loud enough for them to hear over the din of all the conversation that was happening in the theater, "Has anyone seen

Stella?"

Annie turned and said, "I haven't seen her yet, and I've been here quite a while."

Vanessa spoke up and said to Kate, "Oh, Mom, there's Mackenzie! Do you mind if I go and sit with her?"

Mackenzie was Vanessa's best friend. The two of them often reminded Annie of herself and Alice when they were teenagers with their penchant for sharing secrets and having long conversations about cute boys they liked and fashion and what they wanted to do

when they graduated from high school. Kate gave her permission and Annie watched as Vanessa sat down next to Mackenzie a few rows in front of them. The two girls immediately started talking excitedly, their heads close together, erupting in occasional laughter.

It was Peggy who saw Stella first, "Stella's up there, on the stage. And there's the professor too."

The crowd started to quiet down as the lobby doors were closed, and people came down off the stage

and out of the aisles to find seats. Annie looked around again. She saw Dolores and Cyril Fortescue sitting with Stacy Lewis. Felix was nowhere to be seen, but Annie was certain he was there, behind the scenes, making sure everything was in place for the professor. Jacob Martin was standing on the stage with Stella and Professor Howell. It was the first time Annie had seen him since the meeting in the Cultural Center conference room.

The house lights went down to a medium level so that people could finish taking their seats. Professor

Howell stepped to the front of the stage where it bowed out in a semicircle, which Annie had learned was called the "apron." He stood in the very center of the apron behind a little rise in the floor of the stage that Annie knew was actually the roof over the prompter's box. That was where she would be sitting most of the time during rehearsals and all of the time during performances. Then the house lights went down completely, and the spotlights came on and made a pool of light around the professor.

He didn't have a microphone, but when he began to speak his voice was perfectly audible, and his words were clear.

"Welcome, ladies and gentlemen," he began, "to a new adventure"

Annie and all the rest of the cast and crew of King Lemuel's Treasure sat in silence for the next twenty minutes as Professor Howell both informed and inspired them.

11

For Annie, the next few weeks flew by. There were so many things going on that it seemed she never had a chance to stop to catch her breath. The other members of the Hook and Needle Club seemed to feel the same way.

Mary Beth's surgery had gone well, and when the results came back from the lab, it had been determined that her cancer was in an early stage, which was a blessing. She told the others that

she would have to have six weeks of radiation therapy, Monday through Friday, and would have to take hormone therapy for the next five years, but that she didn't have to have chemotherapy, which she felt was another blessing.

At the meeting after her initial trip to the radiologist's office in Portland, Mary Beth said she had been tattooed with tiny spots on the areas where the radiation was to be administered in order to ensure it was done in the exact same place each time. After that, the office visits only took a few

minutes, with each burst of radiation lasting only seconds. However, the daily drive there and back was time-consuming. Fortunately, the weather had been fairly cooperative. There had been a couple of heavy snows, but nothing that prevented Mary Beth from getting through in her SUV.

Though Mary Beth felt well enough to drive herself, as the days wore on, she became increasingly uncomfortable. She described it to the other members of the Hook and Needle Club as “a really bad

sunburn.” The radiologist had recommended a product called “Aquaphor” which helped, but it appeared there would be no complete relief until the end of the treatments. Still, Mary Beth persevered, knowing it was her best chance to beat the cancer and to prevent it from returning, even if it meant that she experienced some pain for a while.

As far as her participation in the production of the play went, Mary Beth had decided she couldn’t attend the practice sessions at the college for the intermission music

while she was getting her radiation treatments, but she promised she would continue to practice on her own at home, and that perhaps when her treatment was over, she might rejoin the ensemble. She had explained the situation to Professor Torres, who was understanding and told Mary Beth she hoped she would be able to play with them when the time came for the actual performances.

Though Mary Beth still came into the shop to work, Annie and Gwen took turns volunteering at A Stitch

in Time to help Kate during the times Mary Beth was away. It wasn't always necessary, but sometimes, if there was a new shipment to be put out, or if Kate was expecting a group, like one of the knit or crochet or quilting guilds from the surrounding area, it was good to have extra help.

Having Gwen or Annie at the store, or sometimes both, also gave Kate a chance to get away in the daytime now and then; besides personal errands, she was still busy with the costumes for the play. Other than Sarah and Vera from the

college and Vanessa, Kate had a team of ladies in Stony Point working away to cut and sew and finish the various costumes. Kate mentioned to the others how glad she was that the professor had directed her to seek out more help; she couldn't have done it on her own.

Alice had rarely made the trek from the carriage house to Grey Gables since the rehearsals began, and the suede house shoes she had left by Annie's front door had sat empty for a couple of weeks. Annie

missed her friend's company, but they did see each other at least during the Hook and Needle Club meetings. All the members had agreed to continue with the Tuesday-morning sessions, no matter what else was going on. It was their chance to catch up with each other and to take a breather from everything else that was going on by doing some needlework.

Many parts of the set were still in the works, and Alice was still working with Wally and Carl Johnson to get all the details finalized. Wally had several

volunteers to help him, including two art students from the college who were doing any scene painting that was required. Peggy and Alice both said that Wally worked closely with Carl Johnson, but Annie had yet to meet him.

At the rehearsals, Annie was usually in the prompter's box at the front of the stage, following along with the actors, trying to be engaged in each scene as the professor had instructed her. She was beginning to think she knew the play, as the professor had said,

“like her favorite song”; if someone said the wrong words, she didn’t even need to look at the script. It just sounded “wrong” to her.

Even though she was mostly confined to her small space, the rehearsals were exciting to Annie. Watching the process of working out scenes—seeing how an emphasis on certain words, a different tone of voice, or the speed of delivery could make a tremendous difference—was a revelation to her about the acting profession. It wasn’t just memorizing words and standing in

the right place at the right time. Dolores and Cyril were obviously the professionals, but there was no hint of condescension toward those who had less experience. The Fortescues were patient and seemed to like nothing better than to work with the other actors offstage to help them with their lines and to work out their scenes together.

And Peggy was blossoming. Annie could see a change in her. Though Peggy was a wife and a mother and worked hard to help

support her family, this was something that was just for her. To Annie it was apparent Peggy was gaining confidence and poise.

For Annie, besides working at A Stitch in Time and attending all the rehearsals, part of her activities involved figuring out the best way to display the "Proverbs 31 Woman" tapestry, as she and the other members of the Hook and Needle Club had come to call it, to protect it so it could be used in the stage set. She and Molly Williams had both done research to figure out the best method, and they consulted

with each other to reach a decision. Though Cyril Fortescue had said he would check with his friends in the antique business, he hadn't mentioned anything to Annie, so she just assumed the play was taking up too much of his time, and that he hadn't been able to follow through.

Annie and Molly decided a frame was needed for the tapestry since it would have to be raised and lowered on the stage several times. After first explaining her plan to Professor Howell and then getting

approval from Stella, Annie went to the woodworking shop in the Cultural Center to see Wally about building a sturdy, but lightweight-as-possible frame.

When she walked into the shop, Annie noticed two things at once: the noise—the buzzing of a power saw—and the odors—freshly sawn wood, and stain, varnish, and paint. Wally was running the power table saw, wearing safety goggles and earmuff-style hearing protection. She would have to wait until he was finished. She wandered over to a couple of chairs against the wall

and took a seat since she didn't know how long it would take.

"What are you doing in here?" shouted a man who had just come out of the storage room next to the workshop. He was about thirty-five years old and his head was clean-shaven. He wore a dull green Henley shirt and blue jeans. Annie had seen him before at the rehearsals. Though they had not been introduced, she was pretty sure he was Trent Bodkin, who was in charge of the lighting and the sound in the theater.

Annie had been startled at the sound of his voice. She shouted back to be heard over the sound of the saw, "I'm here to see Wally."

"You shouldn't be in here!" he shouted. He roughly grabbed Annie's arm and started to pull her out of the chair when the sound of the saw stopped.

"Hey!" said Wally. "Leave her alone."

He released Annie's arm. "She's not supposed to be in here," said the man. "It's dangerous, and there's a lot of expensive equipment and supplies in here. We

can't have just anybody coming in and out of here whenever they feel like it!"

"Mrs. Dawson is OK," said Wally. "She's part of the play too, and she's not going to do anything stupid, or steal anything. I'll vouch for her."

The man looked angry. "Well, if something goes wrong, it's on your head. Don't come bellyaching to me!" And with that, he stormed out of the workshop.

"Thanks, Wally," said Annie, a little shaken. "Is that Trent Bodkin?"

I'm sorry if I caused trouble between you and him."

"Don't worry about it, Annie," said Wally. "Yes, that's Trent Bodkin. I'm sorry if he scared you. He's always like that. He gets sort of carried away sometimes. What can I do for you today?"

Annie proceeded to tell Wally about the tapestry and that she'd like him to build a frame for it so that it could be used for the stage set.

"Oh, yeah," said Wally. "Peggy told me all about the tapestry when you first found it. From her

description, it sounds like it's pretty big. Do you have the dimensions for the size of frame you want?"

"Yes," said Annie, "I have them right here."

On a piece of notepaper, Annie had written the size of the tapestry itself and the size of the frame she wanted, telling Wally exactly what she planned to do.

Wally took the notepaper, and after listening to Annie, he drew a little sketch of what he thought she wanted.

"That looks just right," said

Annie.

"Good," Wally said. "I should be able to finish it in a couple of days. I'll get some lumber for it tomorrow, and I'll call you when it's done."

"Thanks, Wally," said Annie. "And thanks for coming to my rescue."

The next day, Annie purchased several yards of 52-inch-wide linen at A Stitch in Time. When she got the fabric home, she cut it into large sections and then machine-stitched the sections together to make a rectangle that was several inches larger on each side than the

size of the tapestry.

When Wally called to say that the frame was completed, Annie brought the linen rectangle to the workshop, and she and Wally worked to stretch the linen across the frame, stapling it neatly along the back edges of the frame.

When they were finished, Wally asked, "Now what?"

"Now we take it to the fourth floor on the freight elevator," said Annie. "Stella gave me a key for one of the empty offices up there, so we can store it. I'll bring the

tapestry over tomorrow and start working on getting it sewn to the linen."

"If you're going to be sewing on it, would it help if it was propped up or something?" asked Wally.

"Yes," said Annie, "it probably would. Do you have any suggestions?"

"I think I can spare a couple of sawhorses for a little while, if you think it will only take a day or two," said Wally.

"I think that would work perfectly. Thanks, Wally," said Annie.

When it was time for Annie to bring the tapestry to the Cultural Center, she felt a little pang of guilt about taking it away from Grey Gables—though she didn't know any reason why she should feel that way. She reminded herself that she had given her permission to use it in the play, and she had to stand by it.

She gently rolled up the tapestry and wrapped it in some of the leftover linen material. She left the muslin pocket lying on the bed in the upstairs bedroom. From the

upstairs hallway closet she retrieved two flat sheets to take along with her to the Cultural Center. She thought she would use those to cover the tapestry to keep the dust off.

Molly was kind enough to come over to the Cultural Center two days in a row to help Annie carefully hand-stitch the tapestry to the linen cover of the frame. It was a time-consuming and uncomfortable job, but when it was finished, Annie was satisfied that they had made the right choice. Annie went down to the workshop

to ask Wally to come up to the fourth floor to help them move the frame off of the sawhorses.

After they had propped the tapestry up against the wall, the three of them stood back to survey the work of art. Wally whistled low and said, "That's really something, Annie. I can see why Peggy was so excited about it, besides it being a mystery, of course." He said that last part with a big smile.

"Thanks for all your help, Wally," said Annie. "And thanks to you, too, Molly. I'd still be working on this if

you hadn't come over to help me."

"No problem," said Molly. "You do find the most interesting things in your grandmother's attic."

Annie returned the key to the office where the tapestry was stored to Stella the next day, and then she pretty much forgot about the tapestry. She had begun to get used to the busy schedule of working at the shop for a few hours a couple of days a week and going to rehearsals. It reminded her of

her busy life when Wayne was alive, and they worked together at the car dealership they had owned. She had sold it after he died; she just didn't see how she could manage it without him.

Though she was financially stable, she realized she had missed the purpose she felt by having a job to go to every day. But then she had enjoyed her free time too, being able to make plans on a moment's notice. If she'd had a full-time job, she wouldn't have been able to help Mary Beth like she had. It was something she'd have to give

more thought to once the play was finished. She was certainly busy enough for the time being.

The first week of March rolled around quickly, and the first Hook and Needle Club meeting of the month found its members thinking of spring. There was still plenty of snow on the ground, but the days had gotten longer, and the extra sunshine made them long for warmer weather. The knitters and the crocheters were thinking about making lightweight yarn projects. Alice, the only embroiderer, had

started on a pretty bouquet of flowers for a pillow cover. Peggy, the only quilter in the group, was making Emily's favorite doll a small string quilt in bright yellows and greens.

Mary Beth was more than halfway through her radiation treatments, and she was still driving herself to her appointments and still coming in to work every day. The "sunburn" continued to get worse, but she was managing to deal with it.

Annie was a little concerned about Stella. When the project of

the play had started there was a lot of excitement, and it seemed to buoy everyone along, but lately Stella had seemed very tired. She was still keeping up with her more "glamorous" appearance, but she was quieter at this meeting, and Annie didn't see her at the rehearsals as often as she had before.

"How are things going for you?" Annie asked Stella.

Stella had begun knitting a prayer shawl that had a pretty shell pattern, using a super-fine weight

yarn made of a blend of merino wool, rayon from bamboo, and nylon. She looked up from her needles at Annie and smiled. "I'm fine. I have been tired lately. There's just a lot to do with the play and everything. Jason has been helpful, as always, getting me where I need to be and running errands. It's a lot of responsibility; I think I'll be ready for a break when this is all over."

Jason was Stella's driver—she never called him her "chauffer." He had worked for her for many years and looked out for Stella.

"If I can do anything to help you," said Gwen, "be sure to let me know. I've turned in everything for the programs to the printers already, so we won't be getting any new sponsors at this point, and I've got the advertising taken care of for the play. I've got some free time."

"Thank you, Gwen," said Stella. "Since you mentioned it, there is something you can do. The Cultural Center committee is meeting this Thursday in the fourth-floor conference room. It's nothing to do with the play, just some general

business. Do you think you could go as my representative and take notes for me? Professor Howell is having a small dinner party that evening—just a few friends for an evening of ‘conversazione,’ as he put it.” That made Annie smile; she could just imagine how Professor Howell would have said it—with a certain amount of flair, of course. Stella continued, “I was going to tell him I couldn’t come, but I really would like to go.”

“Of course,” said Gwen, “I’d be glad to.”

But on Thursday afternoon, Annie

received a call from Gwen. At first, Annie didn't realize it was Gwen. A scratchy, whispery voice said, "Annie, can you go to the meeting for me this evening?"

"Who is this?" asked Annie.

"It's me, Gwen," said the voice. "I'm sick. I hate to call Stella and spoil her plans. Do you think you could go to the meeting and take notes?"

Annie agreed to attend the meeting that was scheduled for seven o'clock.

She decided to go to The Cup &

Saucer for a quick dinner, and then she walked over to the Cultural Center. The museum was closed, but Bill Witherell was at the door, letting in each committee member as they arrived.

"What are you doing here, Annie?" he asked, in a friendly manner.

Annie explained the situation.

"Glad you could join us then. I hope that Gwen will be better soon," said Bill. He leaned over toward Annie and said in a quiet voice with a hint of amusement, "I never thought I'd see the day that

Stella Brickson would chose a dinner party over a committee meeting. That Professor Howell is quite a character."

When all the members of the committee had arrived—four others besides Bill and Annie—Bill locked the front door, and they all boarded the elevator and made their way to the conference room. The meeting took about forty-five minutes, and as Stella had said, they just discussed some general business, mostly having to do with the upkeep of the building. When the

meeting was adjourned, the others asked Annie how things were going with the play. Eventually the conversation got around to the tapestry; they had all heard about it from Stella.

Annie explained how they had decided to display it, and that it was in an office on that floor. "Would you like to see it?" she asked. There was a general chorus of "yes" from the committee members, so they closed up the conference room and made their way to the opposite end of the hallway to the office where the

tapestry was stored.

Bill unlocked the door and let the others walk into the office first. The tapestry was just as Annie had left it—propped up against the wall, covered with the two sheets she had brought from Grey Gables.

“Bill, could you help me with these?” asked Annie.

She lifted the bottom corner of one sheet and pulled it back to the side of the frame, and Bill did the same with the other sheet. Annie looked at the committee members, expecting to see their admiration

for the tapestry reflected in their faces, but instead they all looked rather blank. In fact, they looked puzzled. Annie moved to the front of the frame to see the tapestry, but to her dismay, she only saw the plain linen fabric that was attached to the frame. The tapestry was no longer there.

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Annie was in a swivet. Bill called the police right away, and Reed Edwards, Stony Point's chief of police, was at the Cultural Center in a matter of minutes. Officer Cal Peters, who had actually saved Annie's life not so long ago, was also there. They promised to do everything they could to find the tapestry, but Annie knew the clues were scarce. There was no way for her to know exactly how long the tapestry had been gone since she

hadn't seen it since the day she had returned the key to Stella.

The other problem was the number of people who knew about the tapestry. Annie had learned through firsthand experience that news of any sort spread like wildfire through Stony Point. It had become common knowledge that the tapestry was going to be used on the stage set among the college people involved with the play as well. She remembered that Cyril had taken photos with his cellphone and was going to contact his friends in the antique and auction

businesses about it. Who knew how far afield the news had traveled?

And it wasn't like the Cultural Center was Fort Knox. The people of Stony Point were generally pretty trusting. Anyone who came into the building could have come up to the fourth floor. The door didn't show any signs of being forced, but Annie didn't think the lock would be that hard to pick for a real thief, or perhaps someone had stolen a key.

It had been Annie's gut instinct to keep the tapestry at Grey Gables, but she had ignored it. Now she

berated herself for not listening to that instinct. She felt like she had let her grandmother down. And what about Lily Cornette? Had she let her down too? With all the activity of the last several weeks, Annie had never followed up on her discovery of the letter. The two boxes of letters still sat in the corner of the living room, and she had never made it over to Longfellow College to see what she could find out about Lily.

All of this still weighed heavily on Annie's mind the next evening at the Friday-night rehearsal. The

professor had arranged for a longer rehearsal than usual, so that they could do a complete run-through of the play. He asked everyone to show up at six that evening and to be prepared to stay as long as necessary.

Peggy's sister, Mitzy, had been at the theater early on; the professor wanted her to have a chance to apply her newly acquired theatrical skills for hair and makeup. All the actors had either applied makeup themselves, or they had been guinea pigs for Mitzy. To Annie,

they looked a little grotesque close up, but she knew that from a distance and in the bright stage lights, the heavy makeup wouldn't look so odd.

Jacob Martin was there too. Annie had seldom seen him at the rehearsals, and when he was there, she had never seen him interact with the Fortescues—the same was true that evening. Apparently the trouble between them had not been resolved yet. Jacob sat next to Professor Howell in the house seats as they watched the actors work their way through the play.

Annie was in her usual place in the prompter's box, but it was hard to keep her mind on the play. Several times, one of the actors had to ask Annie for his or her line, rather than her offering it at the right moment, as she had been doing. Annie wasn't sure if it was just her perception, but it seemed like everyone in the play was on edge. At the intermission mark, Professor Howell called for a twenty-minute break.

"Let's see if we can come back with a little higher level of

concentration," said the professor. Annie didn't think he was referring to her; perhaps it wasn't just Annie's perception after all that everyone seemed to be affected by the disappearance of the tapestry.

It was Stella who suggested that the members of the Hook and Needle Club who were present at the rehearsal should take their break up on the fourth floor in the conference room where they could talk privately. Gwen was still sick, but she didn't normally come to the rehearsal anyway. Mary Beth was also at home. Kate was there that

evening, getting some of the actors to try on their costumes to make sure they fit properly. Alice was there too; the main structure for the great hall set had been put in place, and she had started to work her magic to make it look like a real castle. Peggy was at every rehearsal. Now they were all seated around the conference table.

Stella began by once again apologizing to Annie, taking the responsibility upon herself for the disappearance of the tapestry. Though Annie was upset, she didn't

blame Stella and told her so. "It's not your fault, Stella. Please don't think that I blame you. I was blaming myself for letting the tapestry out of my sight, but the person we should be blaming is the person who took it."

Peggy took a long drink from her bottle of water and then asked, "How are we going to figure out who that is? You don't think it was anyone that's part of the cast or crew—do you?"

"I hate to think that," said Annie, "but I don't see how we can rule it out. Maybe we can spread it around

that we are on to a lead.”

“Like what?” asked Kate.

Annie thought a moment. “We could let it be known that I’m going to go to Longfellow next week, to get information about Lily Cornette and the tapestry. That’s not untrue—I really think it would be a good idea to find out everything we can about her. Over the weekend, I’m going to try to go through some more of Gram’s letters too. There might be something there that could help.”

“So, you think telling people

about Lily Cornette might help smoke out the culprit?" asked Alice. "Sounds like a long shot to me."

"Do you have a better idea?" asked Annie.

"Not at the moment," Alice admitted. "But if I come up with something, I'll be sure to let you know." Alice was facing the windows. "Wow! Look at it snow—it's really coming down. I wonder when that started."

They all looked out the windows from where they were sitting. "I love the snow," said Kate. "I'm not crazy about the cold, mind you, but

the snow is beautiful.”

Just then, Peggy’s cellphone rang. She looked a little sheepish as she retrieved it from her pocket. Professor Howell had given strict orders that he did not want to hear or see a cellphone during rehearsals. Apparently Peggy had forgotten to set her phone to vibrate. Luckily for her, it hadn’t rung during rehearsal. She looked at the display and said, “It’s Mitzy.” Peggy pushed a button and placed the phone over her ear. “Hey, Mitz. What’s up?” Peggy listened for a

minute, her expression concerned.

When Peggy had finished talking and had ended the call, Annie asked, "What is it, Peggy?"

"Mitzy just got home," said Peggy.

"Didn't she leave about an hour and a half ago?" asked Alice.

"That's the point—she said the roads are terrible. She barely made it home. She said she wouldn't even try going out now."

All of the ladies got up from their chairs to look out the windows of the conference room. It was difficult to see the street below in the dull

glow of the streetlights through the swirling snow. "Maybe we should go down to the main level and see what it looks like from there," said Stella.

They took the elevator down to the main floor and peered out through the glass doors of the entrance into the Cultural Center. The ladies could see what could only be described as a blizzard. The wind whipped through Main Street and had already begun to bury the cars that were parked along its sides.

"Were they predicting this much snow?" asked Alice.

"I don't know," said Annie. "I didn't listen to the radio or turn on the television today."

"They were predicting some snow this evening," said Kate, "but I think this is a lot more than they expected, and I don't remember hearing anything about such strong winds."

Just then a powerful gust of wind whipped through, making a fierce howling noise and rattling the doors; the snow was so thick in the air that Annie couldn't even see the

business that was located directly across the street.

"I wouldn't be surprised if the sheriff calls for a code white," said Stella. "I should go talk to Professor Howell so he knows the situation. He might not understand that a code white means there are whiteout conditions—that visibility goes down to almost zero, and that no one is allowed out on the roads, even road crews."

Just then, a tall man, wearing a skullcap, heavy coat, and gloves, and a scarf wrapped around his

face, pounded on the outer door, startling all of the women. Alice didn't hesitate to unlock the door and let him in. He shook off the snow and undid the scarf. It was Ian.

"What are you doing out in this?" asked Annie.

"I was working late at the office, and I'm sorry to say I ignored the phone so I could get some paperwork done. When I checked my messages just a little while ago, I'd had five calls from Chief Edwards. He told me the county sheriff has declared a code white.

No one's going home this evening."

The news that they were all essentially trapped in the Cultural Center affected people in different ways. Most of the students seemed to think it was kind of exciting, and went to the windows in the lobby of the theater to watch the snow pile up deeper and deeper. The locals from Stony Point were worried about their families. Most were busy calling home, including Kate and Peggy.

“Vanessa is all right,” said Kate as she placed her cellphone back in the pocket of her cardigan. “She did her homework, and she said she still has electricity. I told her to call me whenever she wants to. I don’t care what the professor says tonight—if she calls during the rehearsal, I’m taking it.”

“Wally and Emily are all settled in too,” said Peggy. “I’m sure they’ll be fine.”

“I’m glad to hear it,” said Annie. She didn’t have any family in Stony Point, but she did think of Boots at home. Fortunately, she had filled

Boots's water and food bowls just before she came to rehearsal, so the cat wouldn't starve. Annie thought it might do the chubby feline some good to miss at least one meal in any case.

She knew that Gwen would be fine—her husband, John, would be at home with her, and Annie was certain that Gwen's son George, who lived in Portland, would be calling to check on both of them. But Annie wondered about Mary Beth. She lived alone, and she didn't have any children. Her niece,

Amy, was far away in New York City, and who knew where Melanie might be. Annie decided to give Mary Beth a call.

When Mary Beth answered, Annie just said, "Are you all right?"

"Who is this? Annie? Is that you?" said Mary Beth.

"Yes, sorry," said Annie. "I was just calling to make sure you were all right, because of the snow."

"What snow?" asked Mary Beth.

"Look out your window," said Annie. She waited a moment.

"When did this start?" asked Mary Beth.

"I'm not sure," said Annie. "Sometime after six. Did I wake you up?"

Mary Beth confessed that she had been asleep, and Annie apologized for waking her.

"Not a problem," said Mary Beth. "It's good to know that someone cares."

"Lots of people care about you, Mary Beth," said Annie. "I won't keep you any longer. Go back to sleep. A code white has been declared, so we're all stuck here. I'll call you when I get home, hopefully

sometime tomorrow."

After Annie ended her call to Mary Beth, Ian walked over to talk to her. His hair looked unruly after he took off his hat, and he had "five o'clock shadow" around his jaw. He was usually so neat and well-groomed. She barely resisted the urge to reach up and run her fingers through his tousled hair. Instead, she said to him, "You were crazy to come over here in this—why didn't you just stay at your office?"

"And miss all this fun?" asked Ian. "Besides, I didn't want to be in Town Hall by myself. That place

gets spooky at night."

"With the conditions out there, what if you'd gotten lost on the way here?" asked Annie.

"I could never get lost in Stony Point," said Ian. "I know the place by heart. If you were to blindfold me and set me loose, I could find my way around just fine. And believe me, walking over here tonight was like being blindfolded."

"And what if we hadn't been right there by the doors to have let you in?" asked Annie.

"Then I would have headed on

down to The Cup & Saucer," said Ian. "Jeff would have let me in. He never goes home before ten o'clock, even when he can. Or I would have used my cellphone to call one of you. There are always options."

"Well, next time, call first before you just plunge into a storm," said Annie.

"Why?" said Ian. "Would you miss me if I got lost?"

Annie tried to look as if she didn't care, but she found it hard not to smile. "I might miss you, just the tiniest bit, Ian Butler. You know, sometimes you're just infuriating."

Ian turned the full force of his smile on her. "I think you might care about me, just the tiniest bit, Annie Dawson."

Annie blushed profusely and looked around the room. "We should find out what Stella and Alice are doing."

Stella and Alice were talking with the professor and Jacob. When Annie and Ian joined them, they were discussing sleeping arrangements and what to do about food in the morning. After Ian made a couple of quick phone calls, they

made some decisions. Professor Howell used his "theater voice" to get everyone's attention and asked them to sit in the house seats.

There were about thirty people present. Annie sat down and looked around and saw Trent Bodkin sitting at the opposite end of the row just in front of her. She had seen him a couple of times since the incident in the workshop. He never acknowledged her, but she noticed that he barely acknowledged anyone, except the professor and Stella, and she had seen him talking with the two young men

from the college who were working with him as sound and light technicians. Other than that, Trent appeared to have been born with a perpetual scowl on his face. She felt sorry for him. What a terrible way to live.

“As you are all now aware,” began the professor, “we’re going to have to remain here overnight at the very least. Mrs. Brickson and I and some others have been discussing our situation. First, I think we should continue with our rehearsal this evening. We’re here;

we might as well take advantage of it. As far as sleeping goes, Mrs. Brickson has suggested we use the fourth-floor offices, with men in the offices off the east hallway, and women in the offices off the west hallway. We don't have any blankets, or cots, so we'll have to sleep on the floors, but we all have our coats, and the carpet is well-padded. Mrs. Brickson has said that the temperature in each room is easily adjustable. There are several chairs if you prefer to sit up, but we'll have to insist on quiet during the night so that those who want to

sleep can. Are there any questions?"

One of the local volunteers raised her hand and asked, "Couldn't we get rooms at Maplehurst Inn? Surely we could make it across the street."

"Mayor Butler called to check on that, but the inn is already full, and several of their employees had to stay over after their shifts as well, so they are in the same situation as we are here," answered Professor Howell.

One young student who was helping as a stagehand raised his

hand. "What about breakfast?" he asked.

"Good question," said the professor. "Mayor Butler tells me that the owner of The Cup & Saucer across the street is staying overnight at his establishment and plans to be open for business in the morning no matter what. If the roads are still closed at that time, we should still be able to walk across the street."

With those plans in place, the professor called for everyone to take their places to begin the second act. It had now been forty-

five minutes since the beginning of the 20-minute break that they had planned. The excitement of the snowstorm seemed to have regenerated everyone, and the scenes seemed to go a little better than they had before the break.

It was nearly eleven o'clock by the time they had wrapped up the rehearsal and everyone had made their way up to the fourth floor. Stella and Dolores went into the conference room, and Stella asked Annie, Alice, Kate, and Peggy if they wanted join them in the large

room.

Stella seemed exhausted, and sat down in one of the chairs around the table. "I think I'm going to try to sleep in this chair, girls. It's been a long time since I've been to a sleepover. I might not be able to get myself back up off the floor once I lay down."

"Would you like to put your feet up in a chair?" asked Peggy.

"That might not be a bad idea," replied Stella.

Peggy carried a chair over from along the wall and sat it in front of her elderly friend. Stella put her

feet in the chair; she closed her eyes, opening them again as Peggy covered her with her coat. "Are you warm enough?" Peggy asked. "If you need more cover than your coat, you can have mine—I'll be fine."

Annie could see that Stella was touched by Peggy's generosity. "No, Peggy. You cover up with that. I'll be fine here. Maybe if you'd turn the heat up just a bit, that would be good."

Dolores spoke, "It's been a long time since I've been to a sleepover

too, but I think I'm going to try sleeping on the floor anyway. You girls may have to help me up in the morning."

Annie laughed. "I'll help you, if you'll help me."

"I think I'm going to sleep next to a chair so that I can use it to pull myself up in the morning," said Alice. She shook her head and said, "We should be fixing each other's hair and gossiping about boys ... that used to be fun, but here it is, Friday night, and I'm too tired to think about doing anything but sleep."

Each woman, except for Stella, found her own spot on the floor and made herself as comfortable as possible. Kate was nearest the door, so she turned out the overhead lights. Annie's eyes soon adjusted to the darkness, and from her place on the floor, she could make out the dim light reflected from the streetlights below into the snow above as it shone through the tall windows. She hoped there was no one out trapped in the snowstorm, and she began to silently say a prayer of protection

for friends and strangers, and a prayer of thanks for the roof over her head and for warmth. It wasn't long before Annie heard the steady breathing of the sleeping women all around her. She watched the swirling snow until sleep overtook her as well.

13

Annie awoke feeling stiff and not all that well rested. It wasn't long after dawn because the room was still a little dark. She could still see snow falling outside, but it seemed a little less intense than it had during the night.

She sat up and did a few stretches to work the kinks out of her joints. Remembering a time when she could have just jumped up from the floor, she took Alice's idea and reached over to place her

hands on the seat of a chair to help raise herself to her feet.

The others were stirring as well. Annie then noticed that Stella's chair was empty, and she was not to be seen. Peggy was gone too. "Did anyone see Peggy and Stella leave?" asked Annie.

"I did," said Kate. "I heard the click of the latch and saw them leave about an hour ago, I think. It might have been longer—or not that long—I was still dozing off and on."

"Oh, my aching back!" said Alice as she rolled over. "Remind me to

never do this again!"

Dolores was doing a yoga stretch, her hands grasping the outer sides of her feet and her elbows on the floor; her forehead was resting on her knees.

"Wow, Dolores," said Alice. "How can you do that?"

Dolores slowly sat up, curling her back one vertebrae at a time, and smiled. "I've been doing stretching exercises every morning since I was in my teens. My mother was an acting teacher, among other things, and she told me that if I wanted to

be an actress, I had to always take care of my health. She used to say, 'If your body and your voice are not in good shape, your acting cannot be in good shape!'" When Dolores repeated her mother's words, she said them with a cute French accent.

"So, your mother was French, I take it," said Alice.

Dolores smiled. "Yes—she was a war bride. She became an American citizen, but she remained French, if you know what I mean—she cooked pot-au-feu and baked brioche, and she dressed in the French style—

very chic and feminine. She spoke French to me and my brothers and sisters when we were small, and she spoke it to us when we were older if she wanted to get our attention. She always had café au lait with breakfast and drank a glass of wine with dinner. She loved flowers and beautiful things, and she was a very gentle woman—unless we misbehaved. Then she could be quite stern. She had to be that way with five children to care for. My father simply adored her, of course."

"Are your parents still living?" asked Annie.

"No, they died some years ago," said Dolores. "My father went first, and my mother lived several years after he passed away. I miss them, but, as my mother would have said, 'C'est la vie'—such is life—it is the way of things."

Annie debated whether to mention Dolores's daughter, Ophelia, to say how sorry she was for her loss, but she didn't want to bring up the sad memory. It was Dolores who mentioned Ophelia first. "My daughter was so much like

my mother. They were great pals. When Cyril and I worked with touring companies and were traveling from city to city, Ophelia stayed with her grandmother here in Maine at the little house Cyril and I live in now."

"I spent summers with my grandparents in Maine," said Annie. "I'm glad that I had a chance to do that. Those are wonderful memories, and my grandmother taught me so many things." Annie paused and then added, "So did my grandfather, of course, but it was

Gram who took me in hand to make sure I always had something to do. She was the one who taught me to crochet."

"Then you understand how strong that bond can be between a granddaughter and her grandmother," said Dolores. "I think my mother and Ophelia understood each other better than Ophelia and I ever did. That is my regret."

Kate said, "I heard that you have a granddaughter."

"Yes," said Dolores, her countenance brightening. "Isabelle. She's beautiful and intelligent—that

is my absolutely unbiased opinion."

"How old is she?" asked Kate.

"She's thirteen," said Dolores.

"That's just a couple of years younger than my Vanessa," said Kate. "Do she and Jacob still live in California?"

Dolores's face suddenly clouded over. "Yes, they do. Isabelle attends a boarding school there so her father can do what he wants. I'd rather have her here with us, but it appears I have no say in the matter."

An awkward silence followed in

which neither Annie, Kate, nor Alice knew quite what to say.

Dolores apologized, "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have brought up our personal squabbles." She stood up easily, unaided by a chair. "I hear people in the hallway. Maybe we should see what everyone else is doing."

After a trip to the restroom to freshen up, Annie and the others took the elevator down to the lobby of the theater where many of the

cast and crew were milling about. Several long folding tables had already been set up, including a food and drink table along one end. Ian, Jacob, Stacy, and Felix were setting up folding chairs around the other tables.

Dolores saw Cyril talking to Professor Howell and excused herself to join her husband. Annie watched as she gave her husband a brief good-morning kiss. It was a sweet moment. Professor Howell looked away. Annie couldn't tell if he was giving them a moment of privacy or if he was embarrassed—

that didn't seem characteristic of the professor, but his expression was strange. Annie just couldn't read it.

Peggy was busy pouring a full pot of coffee into a brown insulated carafe, like the ones Annie had seen used at The Cup & Saucer. When Peggy finished pouring up the coffee, she replaced the pot on the coffeemaker and began to make another pot of coffee. Next to the coffee area were three tall stacks of Styrofoam, cups and next to those were rows of individual containers

of milk and orange juice. After Peggy had started the next pot of coffee, she set to work opening up bakery boxes full of freshly baked muffins, the kind that Annie often ordered at The Cup & Saucer, and a variety of other baked goods. The smell of coffee and muffins made Annie's tummy growl.

Annie saw that Stella also was helping to prepare for breakfast, setting out Styrofoam bowls—some full of sugar and sweetener packets, and others full of little creamer tubs—in the center of each table. Alice and Kate went to see if they could

help Peggy, and Annie was about to offer to help Stella when Ian looked up and saw her, and walked over to speak to her.

“Good morning, sleepyhead,” said Ian with his characteristic smile. He seemed to have combed his hair that morning, but his five-o’clock shadow from the previous evening had turned into salt-and-pepper stubble. This time, Annie had the urge to reach out and run her hand along his jawline, but of course she didn’t, and she silently berated herself for thinking such things.

Ian appeared to be taking in the condition of her hair. She had brushed it—fortunately she carried the basics in her purse—a small brush, and a little zippered case with a tube of face cream, a concealer stick, a small container of cream blush, an eyeliner pencil and a tube of lip gloss—but she was aware that she had not slept well, and that her hairstyle had suffered along with the rest of her. She reached up to run her fingers through her hair.

“You look gorgeous this morning,” said Ian.

“Well, I know that’s a lie, but thanks anyway,” said Annie with a laugh.

Ian’s smile disappeared, but his eyes were still bright. “I never lie, Mrs. Dawson—you do look gorgeous.”

Annie smiled and shook her head. “I think we need to change the subject. Are you the one who arranged all this?”

“Not just me—Stella is the real organizer,” Ian said. “She had us bring up the tables and chairs from the main-floor classroom, where

they do presentations for school groups that visit the museum. The coffeemaker, coffee, sugar, and creamer, and the cups, bowls, plastic forks, and napkins are from the volunteers' break room on the main floor. When I called Jeff at The Cup & Saucer last evening, I did arrange to get a few things—the baked goods, and the milk and orange juice, and he let us borrow a few carafes too. Jacob and Peggy and I walked over there earlier to pick up everything."

"How is it outside?" Annie asked.

"Still not good," said Ian. "The

wind is fierce. Main Street is pretty much buried, and I'm sure that's the general condition all over. I called the county commissioner earlier, and he said that as soon as the code white is lifted they'll be sending out crews to get the main arteries cleared first."

"So, I guess we'll be here for a while," said Annie.

"I don't doubt that," said Ian.

Annie excused herself so she could help get things set up. When it was evident that all the cast and crew had made it to the lobby, it

was Ian who got everyone's attention to organize them to begin.

"Morning, everyone," said Ian. "I hope you all slept well."

Several in the rumpled-looking group laughed at that.

"Before we have breakfast, a word or two—let's form two lines, and I think we should let the ladies go first." A few of the younger men grumbled at that a bit, including Trent Bodkin, Annie noticed, but Ian ignored it and continued. "Let's have a brief prayer before we begin." Ian closed his eyes and

bowed his head, "Heavenly Father, we thank you for the food we are about to share and for the safety and warmth of this building. We pray for our families, our friends, and our neighbors who are not here with us today, that you would grant them food and safety and warmth as well. These things we ask in Jesus's name. Amen."

A few, including Annie, chimed in on the "amen." Ian looked up and said, "Ladies—please go ahead."

Annie walked over to Peggy, who was starting another pot of coffee,

and said, "You've already done more than your fair share. I'll take care of coffee if it's needed."

"I don't mind, Annie," said Peggy.

"Neither do I," said Annie.

"Please go ahead."

Peggy thanked Annie and got in line with Kate and Alice. It wasn't long before everyone had something to eat and drink, and had found a seat. The coffee situation seemed well in hand, so Annie grabbed a bowl and put a muffin in it, and then poured herself a cup of coffee. Most of the seats were full, but there was a place

open next to Jacob Martin. Annie sat down next to him.

"We've never had a chance to talk before," she said. "My name is Annie Dawson." She shook his hand.

"I remember you from the meeting in the conference room," said Jacob. "You're the prompter—right?" Annie had just taken a bite of muffin, so she just nodded. "I hope that's going well. Some people find that rather tedious."

Annie swallowed and said, "Sometimes it is, truthfully, but

most of the time, I've enjoyed it. I've never seen a play come together. It's been a real eye-opener. I'd have never thought there were so many ways to say the same line."

Jacob laughed. "That's true. I remember one actor who performed in an earlier play of mine; he would say a key line of the play a different way every night, just to see how the reaction of the audience changed. It was amazing. That was one of my first plays, so I went to most of the performances. I don't really do that anymore—for one

thing, I just don't seem to have the time."

"I've noticed that we haven't seen you here that often. Is that because of work back in California?" asked Annie.

"It does have to do with my work there and with my daughter, Isabelle, too. She goes to boarding school, but it's not that far from my house, so I pick her up and bring her home most weekends. Professor Howell asked me to come here this week for the Friday and Saturday rehearsals, so I took the

red-eye to New York and caught a flight up to Portland Thursday morning—he wanted me to be here for a dinner party he was giving that evening. Anyway, Isabelle knew that I would be away, and since she is at the school, I know she is well looked after. It's a great school, and she's getting a wonderful education. It's kind of expensive, but it's something that Ophelia and I discussed before she died. Ophelia wanted to be part of those decisions even though she knew she wouldn't be around to see her daughter grow up. We talked

about the future a lot. That's the way Ophelia was; she was more concerned for Isabelle and me than she was for herself." Jacob paused and took a deep breath; Annie saw a look of pain cross his face momentarily. "If Isabelle hadn't liked the school, we had a back-up plan, but it turns out that she really loves it there. She's smart, and it challenges her, and she's made a lot of good friends."

Annie thought about the way that Dolores had characterized her son-in-law's motive for sending Isabelle

to boarding school—so that he could “do what he wants.” It didn’t sound to Annie like Jacob had sent his daughter to a boarding school because he wanted to be free of his responsibility, or because he didn’t care about his daughter. Annie was sure that both Jacob and the Fortescues only wanted the best for Isabelle. How had they come to be at odds?

Jacob pulled out his wallet and opened it. “This is Isabelle’s school picture from this year.”

Annie smiled as she looked at the photograph. Isabelle had brown

hair like her father, but her face reminded Annie very much of Dolores—she had the same up-turned nose and the twinkle in her eyes. “She’s adorable,” said Annie.

Jacob flipped to a different photo. “This is a family picture we had taken a couple of years ago. You can see how much Isabelle has changed since then. She was just a little girl, but now she’s growing into a young woman. I just wish that Ophelia were still here. Sometimes, I wonder if I’ll know how to handle a teenage daughter.”

Annie looked at the photograph of the young family—mother, father and child smiling broadly for the photographer. Ophelia was blond and very lovely—a pleasant blend of her parents. Annie asked, “What about your mother, or Ophelia’s mother—couldn’t you ask them for advice?”

Jacob continued looking at the photograph as if it were hard to tear his eyes away. “My mom passed away when I was still in college. My dad still lives here in Stony Point though. I stay with him whenever I come here. It’s been

nice to see him more often. As for Dolores—we aren't exactly on speaking terms right now. I'd hoped that when she and Cyril agreed to do the play, that we could sit down and talk about ... well, everything, but I still can't seem to get through to them. They seem to think that I put Isabelle in boarding school because I didn't want her, and I can't seem to get them to understand that Ophelia and I both agreed that it would be the best thing for her."

"Perhaps losing their daughter

makes them fearful of losing their granddaughter, and they just want to be more involved,” said Annie gently.

“Then they should talk to me instead of blaming me,” said Jacob with some bitterness. “I think that’s what it comes down to. They didn’t like it when we moved to California for my career. I don’t think they’ve ever forgiven me for taking their daughter so far away. When she got sick, it made things worse between her parents and me. It’s almost as if they think she wouldn’t have gotten cancer if we’d stayed

on the East Coast. The thing is, moving to California was Ophelia's idea. She always had more ambition for me than I had for myself. I was painfully shy in high school and in college, but when I met Ophelia and we fell in love, she helped me gain confidence in myself. She encouraged me to stretch my talents and to take risks. I would never have had the success that I've had without her." Jacob became silent and closed his wallet and put it back in his pocket.

Annie wasn't sure what to say.

She liked Jacob and the Fortescues; they all seemed like people of good character, but sometime in the past misunderstanding had crept in and caused the lines of communication to break down. Annie wished there was something she could do, but she didn't know how to change their attitudes toward one another.

14

Since the snowstorm hadn't yet abated, and no one seemed to know when the roads would be clear, or when the cast and crew of King Lemuel's Treasure would be able to get home, Saturday became an all-day rehearsal. The code white was lifted, but only authorized vehicles were allowed on the highways until the main highways were cleared. Ian said he hoped that Main Street would be cleared by noon, but he didn't

sound certain it could be done.

Professor Howell relaxed his rule about allowing cellphones to be used during rehearsals, so occasionally, Annie would hear some different ringtone as family and friends contacted each other to make sure they were safe. Kate called Vanessa again to make sure she was still all right, and Peggy talked to Wally and Emily, who wanted her mother to come home so they could go outside and build a snowman and make snow angels.

Stella didn't have a cellphone; she said she refused to get one on

principle. Annie had heard her say more than once that she didn't see why people thought they needed to "jabber away all the time," and she wished they'd be a little more discreet about what they said in public places. She had used a landline phone inside the building to call Jason the previous evening to let him know she was all right and to check that he was home safe, but she didn't see any reason to call him again the next day. "He'll get here when he's able to," she said.

Mary Beth called Annie to check on all of her friends from the Hook and Needle Club, and Annie assured her that they were all OK.

"I'm just glad the storm began on Friday after I got home," said Mary Beth, "so it didn't interfere with my visit to the radiologist. I hope the roads are clear by Monday."

"I hope the roads are cleared today!" said Annie. "Boots is home alone, and she's going to get mighty hungry if I don't get there soon."

"I forgot about Boots!" said Mary Beth.

"I'm going to try to call Gwen later to see if I can get a report about the conditions on Ocean Drive," said Annie. "If it's too bad, I may call Jeremy, the boy who clears the snow from my driveway. He has a snowmobile, and I know he'd be willing to go to the house to feed Boots."

"Well, I'm not even going to try to get out," said Mary Beth. "Even if the roads are cleared somewhat, I can't imagine there will be anybody beating on the door to get into A Stitch in Time on a day like this."

Annie advised Mary Beth to curl up with a good book or to put on a DVD and just relax for the rest of the weekend. She added that she would see her Tuesday at the Hook and Needle Club meeting.

Professor Howell started rehearsal about eight o'clock that morning, and it was almost ten when he called for a break. The snow seemed to have let up some, though the wind was still strong with sudden gusts that would send the snow that had already fallen into white swirls that spun in the air like white tornadoes. Several

people took the opportunity to bundle up in their winter gear to walk over to The Cup & Saucer or go out to the parking area behind the Walker Building to see what it was going to take to dig their cars out of the snow. Most decided it would be better to wait to see if Main Street was going to be cleared before attempting to move the massive amount of snow that had piled up between the cars.

Annie and Alice had ridden over together in Annie's car, so they agreed that they would wait until

later before they tried to go out. Without anything to change into, they didn't want to end up having to wear wet clothing all day.

It was Peggy who rounded up the other ladies of the Hook and Needle Club for a private conference in the seating area of the theater. Most of the people who remained in the building were in the lobby getting another cup of coffee or eating one of the few muffins that had been left over from breakfast, but the house seats and the stage appeared to be empty.

"What is it, Peggy?" asked Stella.

"I just wanted to report that I've been talking up our 'lead' for the missing tapestry," said Peggy.

"What lead?" asked Annie.

Peggy looked at her incredulously and said, "Hel-lo! Earth to Annie! Don't you remember? It was your idea. We planned that we would tell everyone that we had a lead about who might have stolen the tapestry, and that you were going to be checking out some information at the college next week. ... Does that ring a bell?"

"I didn't even think it was all that

good of an idea,” said Alice, “but I told a couple of people too. I can’t believe you forgot,” she said teasingly to Annie. “Is that Ian Butler distracting you again? Do you want me to have a talk with him?”

Annie gave her friend a fake grimace. “No, Ian Butler is not distracting me, and no, I do not want you to have a talk with him. I was just thinking about other things.”

“Yeah,” said Alice, “and that ‘thing’ is about six-foot-two with chocolate brown eyes and is crazy about you. I saw you guys talking.

There was some definite chemistry going on there.”

Kate tried to stifle a laugh, but was not really succeeding. “Now, Alice, you leave Annie alone. She can’t help it if our illustrious mayor can’t keep his eyes off of her.”

“Oh, forevermore, would y’all stop it?” said Annie.

“I guess we’d better stop,” said Alice, still with a mischievous gleam in her eye. “When the Southern accent comes on strong, that’s when you know that you’re really getting to her.”

“Yes,” said Stella in a no-nonsense tone. “Stop teasing her. This is serious business. I mentioned ‘the lead’ this morning, too, at the table I was sitting at for breakfast. Though, I can’t imagine that any of the people I was sitting with had anything to do with it, since it was Professor Howell and the Fortescues, but I think my voice was loud enough that people at the other end of the table might have heard, or maybe even the table next to us. That’s the advantage of being an old woman; if you talk a little loud sometimes, they just

think you're losing your hearing."

Annie laughed inwardly; she didn't think Stella would appreciate it if she laughed out loud. It was one thing if Stella made a comment about her age; it was entirely different if someone else did.

"I talked about 'the lead' too," said Kate, "with some of the people backstage when I was doing some hand-basting on a couple of costumes that had to be taken up. If everyone in the company hasn't heard about it by the end of the day, well, I'll be surprised."

"So, now what do we do?" asked Peggy.

"Just watch for people who act suspicious, I guess," said Annie.

"In what way?" asked Peggy.

"Well, maybe next week, if someone starts asking a lot of questions about what we've learned, that might be someone to watch," said Annie.

"Do we even have a motive as to why someone would want to steal it?" asked Alice. "We don't even have a suspects list yet, do we?"

"Not really," said Annie. "I tried to think about all the people who

knew about it—and that's just about everyone in Stony Point, everyone at the college who is connected with the play, and whoever Cyril contacted in the antique and auction businesses."

"Hey—maybe it's an international art thief," said Peggy, not all that seriously.

"In Stony Point?" said Kate. "Have you seen anyone who looks like Cary Grant or Pierce Brosnan loitering around A Stitch in Time? I haven't. In the movies, international art thieves are always

rakishly handsome, but they usually hang out in Monte Carlo and Paris. You never see a movie about an international art thief who looks like balding Mr. Kendall from over at the bank, lurking around in a scenic little town waiting for some lost da Vinci portrait to be discovered."

"Well," said Alice, "if a priceless treasure ever was to be discovered in Stony Point, I'd bet you dollars to doughnuts it would be in Annie's attic."

After the morning break, the company rehearsed until noon. Stella and Ian had once again arranged the meal with the help of a few of the backstage people who weren't immediately involved in what was going on the stage. The table that had held the baked goods that morning now held two large trays of sandwiches and an extra-large slow cooker full of hot chowder from The Cup & Saucer.

This time, Annie found an empty seat next to Stacy Lewis, the actor playing the title character of the play. Though she had met him

briefly at Grey Gables, and had said a few words to him at the theater on occasion, she knew very little about him. She had been impressed by his talent as she watched him interact with Cyril and Dolores onstage. Annie thought that the Fortescues seemed favorably impressed with the young man too.

"Have you always wanted to be an actor?" asked Annie.

Stacy smiled. Annie remembered her earlier comments to Alice about how handsome he was. If she'd been a teenage girl, or maybe a

little older than that, she would have definitely been smitten. "No, not always. Let's see ... when I was twelve, I wanted to be a baseball pitcher, and when I was thirteen, I wanted to be a paleontologist and study dinosaurs, and when I was fourteen, I wanted to be a football player, and when I was fifteen, I wanted to be a rock star, and when I was sixteen, I wanted to be ... hmm ... I can't remember what I wanted to be when I was sixteen. The point is, that by the time I graduated from high school, I had thought that I wanted to be

everything from an astronaut to a zookeeper.

“I was taking general courses my first year at Longfellow while I tried to decide on my major,” Stacy continued. “Just as a fluke, I decided to take a class—Intro to Acting—that Professor Howell taught. I was hooked. I tried out for a play that the theater department was putting on, and I got a part. It was a small role, but I haven’t looked back since. I guess being an actor gives me an opportunity to be, at least for a few hours, a lot of

those things I dreamed of being when I was a kid."

"I never thought of it that way," said Annie, smiling. "Are you from around here?"

"No," said Stacy, "I'm from Ohio, but my father graduated from Longfellow, and he wanted me to go there too. The tuition is a little steep since it's a private college, but my mom and dad have done all right, and they saved so they could afford to send me to college. I like it. It's a small school, but it has a beautiful campus, and the faculty is top-notch. Have you been there?"

“Not yet,” said Annie. “I’m planning to go next week though, to do a little research about the tapestry that was stolen.”

“Well, I hope you can learn something that helps recover it. Cyril showed me some of the photos he took of it on his phone. It would have really added atmosphere to the stage set. I wonder what they’ll do now.”

Annie wondered that too after Stacy mentioned it. She hadn’t even thought about how not having the tapestry would leave a huge gap in

Alice's set design, and Alice hadn't said what her back-up plan was, or if she even had one.

"I don't know," she said. "I'm sure Alice will come up with something wonderful."

"She's a nice lady—and she's got a lot of style," said Stacy. "She looks a lot like my mom actually."

Ouch! thought Annie, I hope he doesn't say that to Alice. "How did your parents feel about you becoming an actor?" asked Annie.

"At first they weren't too crazy about it, but now, I think they're proud of me. They've come up here

to see the other plays I've been in, and they'll be coming up for this one too. They've already booked rooms for that weekend at Maplehurst Inn. My parents are really excited that I'm working with actors the caliber of the Fortescues. They saw them in a Broadway show back in the nineties. I'll graduate this spring, and it will look great on my résumé to be able to say I was in a play with Dolores and Cyril Fortescue."

After lunch, Annie made her way back to her “little box” under the stage—that’s what she had come to call the prompter’s box. In order to get there, she had to pass through the cluttered backstage area, watching out for stagehands busily moving scenery and props to set up for the next scene. She wended her way through the labyrinth of props, walking past a large clothes rack full of costumes until she was almost to the staircase that went down to the storage area under the stage.

Annie stopped a moment and

glanced up at the “grid”— the structural support for the machinery that was used to raise and lower scenery, lights, and any other design elements required for the play. The grid was located just below the ceiling of the stage and spanned the entire stage area, including the backstage. Before rehearsal had begun that morning, Annie had seen Trent Bodkin and one of the student lighting technicians adjusting the focus of some of the lights in the grid. Now the tall stepladder they had been

using sat in front of the stairs. Annie wasn't superstitious, but she didn't especially want to walk under the ladder, so she scooted it over to one side so she could get around it. Then she descended the stairs that took her under the stage.

Since the theater was new, there were very few things actually stored below the stage. Still, the space had a claustrophobic affect on Annie. The lighting was dull, and the corners were dark; in that respect, it was a little bit like the attic at Grey Gables before she had the new track lighting installed. She

was always glad when she reached the narrow set of steps that took her up to her "little box" where she could sit on her padded seat and stick her head up, just above the level of the stage. There was a slanted desk area where she laid her script and a couple of pencils; there was also a little light over the desk she could click on and off. Annie had learned to bring along a bottle of water in case she got thirsty and a small pack of tissues in case the story she was watching unfold got to her once again.

The stage was ready and the rehearsal began. From her place in the prompter's box she could see the entire stage and into the wings on each side. She really thought she had the best seat in the theater.

The company had worked on the first act in the morning, and now, in the afternoon, they began working on the second act. No matter how many times she had seen it, it affected her. At this phase of rehearsals, the actors were still learning about their characters and experimenting with how to deliver

their lines for the best effect. Sometimes, it was hard for Annie not to give in to the emotion of the scene, but she knew she had a job to do, and so she watched carefully, trying to be detached from the storyline, but engaged with the particulars of the play.

The time passed quickly. When Annie glanced at her watch it was nearly two o'clock. Just then, Professor Howell came striding across the stage to stand just a few feet from Annie. He asked for everyone's attention in order to

make an announcement.

"Attention everyone! I've just received word that Main Street has been cleared, and the ban on car traffic has been lifted. We'll suspend rehearsal for now. You all did a great job yesterday and today under very difficult conditions. Thank you for all your hard work! We'll plan to meet here at our usual time Monday evening. You're free to go."

Annie stepped out to the side of her "little box" so she could stand up straight. She usually needed to do some stretches after sitting for

so long, but the little set of stairs outside the box was not conducive to safely doing that, and she didn't like lingering in the under-stage storage area, so she hurried over to climb the stairs up to the backstage area.

When she reached the top of the stairs she didn't see anyone else around. That wasn't unusual. The time it took her to reach the stage was enough time for the others to leave the stage, and since everyone wanted to get home as soon as they could, no one was going to

hang around now. Alice was probably getting her things together and would be waiting for Annie in the main-floor lobby. Now Annie just wanted to take a good stretch. She extended her arms out to her sides and then over her head; she moved her shoulders forward and backward, and then her head side to side.

Suddenly she heard a strange twangy noise. Glancing right and left, she couldn't quite make out what it was. Then she heard a loud snap above her head. Rather than look up, she instinctively moved to

get away from that spot, but her foot caught on the bottom of the stepladder she had pushed to the side earlier, and she started to fall forward. Before she hit the floor, she felt something heavy fall on her leg, knocking her down even harder. She heard the crash of the weighty object and the sound of her own voice crying out in pain.

Her body ached from hitting the floor, but what really hurt was her left leg. She tried to look toward her legs to see what had fallen on her, but when she raised her head,

she felt dizzy and nauseated. She wasn't sure how long it took for someone to come, but it seemed like ages.

The first one to reach her was Ian. She was relieved to see his face, as pale as it was. When he saw her, he whispered her name, "Annie," as if he couldn't catch his breath to speak; then he knelt beside her and quietly said her name again. "Annie, can you hear me?"

She answered, "Yes," but her own voice sounded far away.

"Do you know who I am?" he

asked.

She smiled a little. "Ian."

He reached in his pocket and pulled out his cellphone and punched in some numbers. "Help is coming, Annie. One way or another."

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Annie spent the next few days in the hospital. She had suffered a concussion and the lower part of her left leg was broken. She had several bruises on the side of her face and over the rest of her body from the fall she had taken. She didn't remember a lot about what had happened after Ian came to her side, and even the few moments before that were hazy in her memory. She supposed it was the result of her head injury.

After her broken bones had been set, and her leg put in a cast, and when she began to feel a little better, she was allowed more visitors. In turn, all the members of the Hook and Needle Club and several members of the play's cast and crew visited her.

The first time Ian visited, he came into the hospital room carrying a beautiful arrangement of flowers for Annie. He didn't say much, but he did hold her hand. She didn't pull her hand away; she found his touch very comforting. She thanked him for coming to her

aid. When it was time for him to go, he lightly kissed her cheek and said he would be back the next day.

Each member of the Hook and Needle Club brought a small gift. Alice bought an anthology of popular poems for Annie, saying that she thought it might be better to stay away from exciting mystery stories for a while. She assured Annie that she had been looking after Boots and that everything at Grey Gables was fine. Alice had put together a little suitcase of personal items from Grey Gables and had

brought it along too.

With some help, Alice had gotten Annie's car dug out of the snow in the parking lot and had driven it home to Grey Gables. Alice also told Annie that she had called LeeAnn in Texas and had given her Annie's room number, so she would be calling very soon.

Peggy and Kate came together to see Annie. Peggy gave Annie a manicure set along with a bottle of lavender-scented hand cream. Kate gave her a pair of soft slippers she had crocheted, explaining she had placed nonslip strips on the one for

the right foot, and had made the left one a little bigger so Annie could slip it over her cast to cover her toes which stuck out at the end.

Gwen gave Annie a pretty light blue flannel bathrobe with a satin fold-back collar, and Stella gave her a bed jacket that tied at the neck and had lace around the neck and at the end of the sleeves, "so you can look decent." Mary Beth brought her a crossword puzzle book, and a small set of bamboo crochet hooks, and a ball of wool-blend sock-weight yarn in a

pleasing dark shade of blue.

When LeeAnn called she insisted that she was going to come to Maine to stay with her mother when she got out of the hospital, but Annie told her that it wasn't necessary.

"You know that I'd love to see you, and you're always welcome," said Annie, "but the truth is, I have plenty of help up here. With the twins in school and all that you have going on there, it's just too much. I'd rather you take some time later, when I'm all better, and come up as a family. Then I can

really enjoy your company. Herb and your kids need you at home right now, and I am well taken care of here."

LeeAnn finally relented. "I wish you weren't so far away, Mom. I miss you, and I worry about you."

"I miss you too," said Annie, "but please don't worry about me. Accidents happen."

"Are you sure this was an accident?" asked LeeAnn.

"What else could it be?" asked Annie.

"It's just that Alice said

something that made me wonder ...
." LeeAnn's words trailed off.

"What did Alice say?" asked Annie.

"I'm sure it's nothing. I'm probably imagining things," said LeeAnn. "Sorry, but it's almost time to pick up the kids. I'll call you again this evening. Love you, Mom."

"I love you too, honey," said Annie.

The conversation with her daughter made Annie wonder. When she tried to talk to her friends about the accident, they hemmed

and hawed, apparently unwilling to discuss it. Only Ian had talked to her about what had happened, a few days later, telling her that a cable had snapped and a counterweight had fallen on her leg. He had asked Annie what she remembered just before the accident. She told him she remembered clearly the professor's announcement that the roads were open, and then climbing the stairs afterward, but after that her memory was a blank. He just patted her hand and assured her

that was normal after head trauma like she had had. She shouldn't worry about it.

The Fortescues stopped by to see Annie too. It was the day before she was scheduled to go home, and she was feeling much better. If laughter is the best medicine, Cyril and Dolores delivered it; they told her stories about their early years in touring companies that brought back her smile and made her chuckle and laugh out loud.

Professor Howell had been particularly apologetic when he came to see her, as if it were his

fault she was in the hospital. He just kept repeating, "I'm just so sorry that this happened."

"It's not your fault," said Annie. "Please don't keep saying that."

"I suppose you'll sue the Cultural Center now, and everything will be ruined," said the professor miserably.

Annie sighed. "First of all, I'm not going to sue anyone. It was an accident. Stella said my medical expenses are covered by the Cultural Center's insurance, and that's all I care about. Second,

nothing is 'ruined.' The play will go on, and it's going to be a tremendous success."

The professor didn't look convinced, but Annie thought that it seemed as if he was, in a strange way, "enjoying" the drama of it all. He didn't want to seem to let it go, and Annie was so ready to be "over it." She just wanted to get home to Grey Gables and to Boots, and to curl up on her own sofa with her new crochet hook and her new yarn and forget about the accident. She looked down at her cast; Well, she thought, I'll forget about it as much

as I can.

Alice and Gwen brought Annie home after her stay in the hospital. That morning it was still very cold, but it was sunny and the great outdoors, with its thick layers of gleaming-white snow, sparkled as if it was covered with a million tiny diamonds. Though the driveway and the front walk had been shoveled, there remained a layer of hardpacked snow that was slick in places. Annie was mobile with her

crutches, but she was still getting used to them. It took some time, but with her friends beside her she made it from the car to the front door of Grey Gables.

Once she was inside she took a deep breath. Home. It had to be the most wonderful place on earth. Alice took Annie's coat, hat, scarf, and gloves, and then helped Annie sit on the hallway bench so she could take off her one shoe and put on the slipper Kate had made for her; the other slipper was already over her cast, keeping her toes toasty warm. Annie had worn a pair

of navy blue flannel pajamas for the ride home, the pants leg being just loose enough to fit over her cast.

Gwen went into the kitchen to put on the kettle to make a pot of tea, and Alice walked beside Annie as she slowly hobbled into the living room. As soon as Annie sat down on the sofa, Boots leapt up to sit on her lap. Annie laughed and scratched the purring cat's back. "Oh, I missed you too, Boots." Her homecoming was complete.

Looking up at Alice, Annie said, "You and Gwen don't have to stay

here. I can manage."

Alice said, "If you think we're just going off and leaving you here alone, you can forget that. I'll have to leave in a little bit for a Princessa party, but Gwen is going to stay to keep you company this afternoon, and I'm staying over the next few nights, until you feel a little more at ease with your crutches."

Annie was grateful. She thought she probably would have been all right alone, but it was a comfort to have good friends she could depend on. The members of the Hook and Needle Club had made

arrangements to come and spend time with her over the next several days, fixing her lunch and dinner, and doing some general cleaning and dusting around Grey Gables. They also ran errands to the grocery store and the post office, and picked up books and magazines at the library for her to read—it was like having a fully staffed manor house. Annie felt like she'd won some version of the old "Queen for a Day" game show.

Her friends talked to her about what was happening in town and

how the rehearsals were going, but no one ever mentioned the accident, or hurriedly changed the subject if Annie started talking about it.

As much as she appreciated all their help, Annie knew she had to try to get into a routine of activity. The first few days after she got home, Annie felt like all she did was sleep. She was getting better with her crutches and felt steadier on her feet every day. She habitually made a circuit around all the rooms of the house on the lower level just for some exercise. After a week,

she told Alice that she didn't need to continue to sleep at Grey Gables, and that she was sure she could manage going up and down the staircase by herself just fine. Slowly, her friends allowed her to be independent again.

Annie hadn't forgotten about the tapestry. She decided she would spend part of each day going through the two boxes of her grandmother's letters that she had brought down to the living room weeks before. When Ian stopped by one day, she asked him to carry

down the letter boxes for the intervening years—there were only four, but they were some of the largest among the boxes of letters that her grandmother had saved.

Since Annie knew what to look for now, she didn't have to read each letter. She found several more letters from Lily Cornette, but none of them mentioned the tapestry. She came to the conclusion that she needed to go to the college to investigate further.

After two weeks inside, Annie was starting to get cabin fever. The first day of spring would soon

arrive, and though the weather was cold and there was still plenty of snow on the ground, it just felt different to Annie, and she wanted to get outside. She approached Alice with the idea of going over to Longfellow College.

"I don't think that's a good idea," said Alice.

"Why not?" asked Annie. "I thought everyone was for finding out what we could about Lily. That was part of the plan."

Alice looked uncomfortable. "That was before. Now I don't think you

should pursue it.”

“Everyone’s been acting very odd whenever I bring up the tapestry since my accident,” said Annie. “Don’t think I haven’t noticed. Every time I bring it up, or anything to do with it, you all change the subject. What gives?”

Alice sighed. “I guess it’s time you knew. Your ‘accident’—it wasn’t an accident. Someone cut the cable that was holding up the counterweight, or at least severed it enough that it eventually gave way.”

“What?” said Annie. “No. That

can't be. The police would have wanted to talk to me."

"Chief Edwards did want to talk to you," said Alice. "But Ian talked Reed into letting him 'interrogate' you instead."

Annie thought back to the hospital. Ian had been the only one who had asked her what she remembered. Her mind raced. She still couldn't remember those few moments before she was injured. Was the falling counterweight meant for her? How could someone plan something like that?

"Alice, I appreciate that you were all just trying to protect me, but don't you see that this makes it all the more urgent for us to learn what we can? If you won't go with me, I'll just drive myself. My right foot is fully functional," Annie threatened, "and there's no reason I can't do it." She knew that Alice would never consider letting her go to Longfellow by herself. And she was right.

The drive to Longfellow College

took about thirty minutes from Stony Point. Mary Beth had finished her radiation treatments and was awaiting the next round of tests, so she insisted that she would stay at A Stitch in Time so that Kate could go with Annie and Alice to the campus after so many weeks of coming in to work at the store every day. Alice drove Annie's Malibu since it was a little roomier than Alice's Mustang. Kate sat in the front seat and acted as the navigator. She had been to the college many times over the last few weeks to confer with the girls

who were helping with the costumes for the play. Annie was in the backseat, sitting at a slight angle so she could prop up her broken leg, which was difficult since she was also wearing her seatbelt. She wiggled her toes inside her new “cast protector”—as Annie called it—that she had crocheted using the ball of yarn and one of the new crochet hooks that Mary Beth had given her in the hospital. She was pleased with the result. It completely covered the cast and had the advantage of staying in

place when she moved around a lot. Her crutches were lying across the backseat floor.

A few days before, Annie had looked up the phone number for the main office of the college. She asked the lady who answered if there was someone with whom she could make an appointment to talk about Lily Cornette, explaining that Lily had corresponded with Annie's grandmother and that many of the letters she wrote had the return address of Wilson Hall at Longfellow. The receptionist told her that Professor Mabel Pettit was

head of the folk arts department and that her office was in Wilson Hall, the building that housed the school of fine arts and crafts. She thought Professor Pettit might be able to help her and transferred Annie to the administrative assistant of the department. The assistant was efficient, but not chatty, so Annie just made an appointment.

In the car, Annie had brought along the small "Home Song" tapestry and the letters she had found that Lily had written to Betsy.

She had also asked Cyril for copies of the photographs he had taken of the Proverbs 31 Woman tapestry. He sent them to her via her email, and Annie had copied them to a flash drive so she could take them to the college and show them to Professor Pettit on a computer screen. It was LeeAnn who had recommended that Annie should start backing up her computer files with the little devices that she could just plug into the side of her laptop. It still amazed her that such a small thing, no larger than a key chain, could contain so much information.

It was a weekday, so the campus was busy and parking places weren't easy to find. Most parking spots near the buildings were reserved for faculty, but there were a couple of handicap spaces. Unfortunately, it hadn't occurred to Annie to think of asking for a permit for that purpose. In the interest of saving time, Alice and Kate decided to drop off Annie as near to the entrance of Wilson Hall as they could get, so she wouldn't have to walk so far, and then Kate would help Alice find the visitor's parking

area.

It was somewhat chilly out, but Annie had dressed for it, so she didn't mind. The snow had begun to melt away though there were still many patches on the ground and large heaps of it where the snow had been pushed aside to clear streets and walkways. Annie took a moment to look around at the buildings and the grounds of the campus. It was charming, even at that time of the year when the grass was hay-colored, the trees were still bare of leaves, and the snow that remained had lost its

luster.

The large buildings on the campus were all made of red brick, connected by pathways made of the same-color brick. The walks were crowded with students, some alone, some in groups, but all carrying backpacks or book bags. In the center of the grounds was a large three-story building that seemed to be the heart of the campus. From the center of its roof arose a tall bell tower with a domed roof. Annie wondered if the bell in the tower was ever rung.

She turned to look at Wilson Hall. Even though the brick matched the other buildings, the style of this one was different. The front of the building was decorated with four white columns, and between the columns were tall entry doors. Concrete steps led up to the doors, but thankfully, at some point an access ramp had been added to one side of the stairs. Annie made her way toward the ramp.

Once she was inside, she was equally impressed with the interior of the building. The ceilings were very high and covered with ornate

copper-color tin panels; the woodwork was the color of dark honey. She walked further into the lobby and looked into a large room that was off to one side. It had a fireplace and groups of comfy chairs scattered around with coffee tables between them. Annie could imagine students finding their way here between classes to study or socialize. She found herself wondering if it had been like this when Gram took classes here. She tried to imagine her grandmother as a young woman, sitting in this

room, perhaps reading a book, or talking and laughing with friends. The thought made Annie smile.

She looked at her watch. It was nearly time for her appointment, but there was no sign of Kate and Alice. As she was debating whether to take the elevator to the second floor where she had been told that Professor Pettit's office was located, she heard the outer door open. Looking up, she expected to see Kate and Alice, but she was surprised. It was Professor Howell instead.

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When Professor Howell saw Annie standing in the lobby of Wilson Hall, his face registered momentary surprise too, but he recovered quickly. "Mrs. Dawson! How lovely to see you out and about. What brings you to Longfellow?"

"Good afternoon, Professor," said Annie. "I have an appointment with Professor Pettit to talk about Lily Cornette—the person we think made both of the tapestries from

Grey Gables.”

“How interesting,” said Professor Howell. “I would love to stay and chat, but I have to conduct a class shortly.”

“Is the theater department in this building?” asked Annie.

“No,” said the professor. “The theater department is in a new facility. It’s located on the Wadsworth campus.”

Annie looked puzzled. “Where’s that?”

“It’s just on the other side of the woods to the west of this campus. There’s a road and a walkway

through the center of the woods that bridges the two campuses," said the professor. "You see, Wilson Hall and all the other buildings in this section are the original campus. When the board of governors decided to enlarge the college, they didn't want to detract from the historical flavor of it by incorporating modern styles of buildings here, so they planned a second campus, named after Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's grandfather, Peleg Wadsworth."

Annie smiled. "I'm glad they did

that. I was thinking earlier how charming these old buildings are.”

“I agree,” said the professor. “But you must take a drive through the new campus before you leave Longfellow today, and if you have time, stop in to see our theater—the Maxine Elliot Theater; it’s named after the famous stage actress from Maine. Now, I really must go. I teach a class on historical costuming in this building twice a week. Again, it’s lovely to see you. I hope your leg continues to heal and that we’ll see you back at your duties as prompter soon.

Believe me when I say that we miss you!"

With that, the professor made for the staircase, and for a man of his age and build, Annie was surprised to see him spring up the steps two at a time. It was then that Alice and Kate entered the building. They were slightly out of breath.

"You just missed Professor Howell," said Annie. "He teaches a class in this building."

"Professor Howell? What a coincidence," said Alice. "Aren't we running a little late for our

appointment? We got here as fast as we could."

Annie looked at her watch. "Yikes! Yes, we'd better get going."

Annie, Alice, and Kate took the elevator to the second floor. Annie had written down the office number, and the three women walked down the hallway checking the small plaques on doors. There were also classrooms with classes in session, so they walked quietly down the hallway, speaking in low voices as they looked for Professor Pettit's office. Finally they reached the door with the correct number,

and Annie knocked on the door. A woman's voice said, "Come in."

The office was tiny and packed to the gills with books and papers and a small desk that faced a narrow window. Professor Pettit sat in an office chair facing the laptop on her desk, but then she swiveled around to face them after they stepped inside. There was a single extra wooden chair in the room, but there was barely enough room for Annie, Alice, and Kate to stand.

Annie reached out to shake Professor Pettit's hand. "Professor

Pettit? I'm Annie Dawson. Sorry we're late. This is Alice MacFarlane and Kate Stevens. We're here to talk to you about Lily Cornette."

"It's very nice to meet you all," said Professor Pettit in a broad New England accent. "I'm Mabel Pettit—please call me Mabel. I was just grading some essays. I think the four of us will be a little crowded in here. Perhaps we should go down to the Emerson Room on the main floor."

It turned out that the Emerson Room was the room that Annie had looked into with the upholstered

chairs. The four ladies sat down to face one another around one of the coffee tables.

"How may I help you?" asked Mabel. "Why are you researching Miss Cornette?"

Annie started at the beginning and explained everything to Mabel, ending with the theft of the tapestry.

"That's extraordinary," said Mabel. "You have pictures of what you call the Proverbs 31 Woman tapestry?"

"Yes," said Annie. "I have it on a

flash drive. Oh! And I almost forgot." Annie reached into her tote bag and took out the "Home Song" tapestry and laid it out on the coffee table. "This is the one that has been hanging in my grandmother's living room for years and years." She once again reached into her bag and pulled out a stack of letters Lily had written to Betsy Holden, that Annie had tied together with a length of lavender satin ribbon. She handed the stack to Mabel, explaining what they were.

Mabel looked at the tapestry on

the table for a long time, and then untied the packet of letters and shuffled through the envelopes. "Well, Annie," she finally said, "this is an amazing find."

"Does that mean that Lily Cornette was the person who made the tapestries?" asked Alice.

"I'll have to see the photographs of the other tapestry, but if it is as you say, and it has the same signature panel as this tapestry, then, yes, I would have to say that both are Lily Cornette tapestries."

"What can you tell us about her?"

asked Annie.

“Let me show you something first,” said Mabel. She got up from her chair and walked toward a corner of the room that was adjacent to the doorway. The others followed suit. When Annie turned around to follow Mabel, it was only then that she saw the tapestry on the wall. This tapestry wasn’t as big as the Proverbs 31 Woman tapestry, but it was still quite large. It was mounted on a frame much the same way as Annie and Molly had done, but with the additional protection of a glassed-in

cover over the top of it, the surface of the glass about an inch away from the tapestry with air vents along the sides.

It was similar in layout to the “Home Song” tapestry that Annie was so familiar with. At the top of it was a scene, though this one showed a room filled with women in seventeenth-century clothing instead of a cabin. Each woman in the scene was engaged in something to do with needlework—carding, spinning, winding yarn, and embroidering. In the area below

there was a stanza from a poem by one John Taylor, and dated 1631:

“Flower, Plants, and Fishes,
Beasts, Birds, Flyes, and Bees,
Hills, Dales, Plaines, Pastures,
Skies, Seas, Rivers, Trees;

There’s nothing neere at hand, or
farthest sought,

But with the Needle may be
shap’d and wrought.”

Annie looked at the bottom of the tapestry for the signature panel, and she was not disappointed. This one read, “L.C.~MCMLII~L.C.”—this tapestry was from 1952.

“Wow,” said Kate. “This is so

cool, Annie! I'd have never believed that we'd ever have found out who made the tapestries from Grey Gables; I can't wait to tell the others!"

Annie agreed and smiled, but then her attention was drawn to a framed black-and-white photograph of a woman next to the tapestry. The woman was posed, holding a threaded tapestry needle in one hand, a small partially embroidered piece of cloth spread across her lap with a corner of it grasped in her other hand. Her hair was dark, but

streaked with gray, and was pulled back and up, but not severely—several strands were loose, as if she had just taken a moment from a busy schedule to sit for the portrait. Her expression was pleasant, but unsmiling. She was wearing a pair of pince-nez clipped to the bridge of her nose, and she looked through the unframed eyeglasses, not at the camera, but at some point distant, with a look of deep thought.

Beneath the portrait was a plaque that read:

LILY CORNETTE

Sept. 18, 1901–March 20, 1968

Friend, educator, needleworker, and preserver of the traditions of the fiber arts. Thirty-five years she spent at Longfellow College, teaching and encouraging her students to carry on those traditions. In life, she was energetic and modest. In death, we remember her with respect and affection, and offer her the praise she refused when she was among us.

Annie couldn't speak for moment. Now, she not only knew who made

the tapestries from Grey Gables, but she had a face to go with the person she had learned about in the letters that had been written to her grandmother. Lily Cornette had obviously been an extraordinary woman to receive such a tribute.

It was Mabel who suggested they should go back up to her office so they could bring up the photos of the Proverbs 31 Woman tapestry on her computer. After Annie put the small tapestry and Lily's letters back in her tote, they took the elevator back up to the second floor. In Mabel's office, Annie sat in

the wooden chair, and Alice and Kate stood while Mabel plugged in the flash drive and brought up the photos. She was silent as she scanned through the pictures.

"This is amazing, ladies," said Mabel when she had finished. "I've never seen or heard of this one before. It's just extraordinary. Nineteen-sixty-six—it must have been the last tapestry she made. Lily Cornette died of cancer in 1968, but she was ill for some time before that."

Annie thought of Lily's letters.

The last letter from Lily that Annie had found among her grandmother's letters was from 1967, and there was no mention of cancer.

"Do you know what sort of cancer it was?" asked Kate in a quiet voice.

"Yes," said Mabel. "It was breast cancer. It wasn't discovered early, so even though they did a total double mastectomy, afterward they discovered that the cancer had already metastasized to the bone. There was really nothing they could do to save her."

Annie, Alice, and Kate were silent

for a moment, each buried in thoughts of the fate that might have awaited Mary Beth if her cancer had not been discovered early and feeling sympathy for what Lily must have gone through.

It was Annie who broke the silence. Speaking to Mabel, she said, "Can you think of any reason why someone would want to steal the tapestry?"

"Well, yes," said Mabel. "Lily Cornette tapestries are highly valued. There are tapestries of hers hanging in museums all over the

world now. We don't spread it about, but the college has had an offer of two-hundred-thousand dollars for the one you saw downstairs."

"You're kidding," said Alice. "So Lily Cornette was rich?"

"No," said Mabel. "As often happens with artists, it was only after her death that her tapestries became appreciated and started to be collected by art dealers and sold at auctions. In the 1980s, prices started to rise, and by the early 2000s the bids for them just went through the roof. I would imagine

that the little tapestry in your tote bag is worth many thousands of dollars. I wouldn't be surprised if the tapestry you found in your attic would receive a bid as high as a million dollars if it were to be sold at auction. I think that's a pretty good motive, don't you?"

The ride home was quiet at first. Annie's mind was whirling. Not that many people had actually seen the tapestry, besides people that she absolutely trusted—the members of

the Hook and Needle Club, Wally Carson, and Molly Williams from Expert Cleaners—and people she didn't know as well, but who she just couldn't imagine stealing it—Professor Howell, Dolores and Cyril Fortescue, Stacy Lewis, and Felix Bordman. She refused to believe that any of them could have anything to do with something dishonest. It must have been someone who knew a lot about the art scene, and when they heard about the tapestry and the name of Lily Cornette, they knew that it was extremely valuable and had

somehow managed to find out where it was being kept. But who could that be? How would she ever be able to track down some stranger and make him or her return the tapestry? It seemed impossible.

Annie broke the silence in the car. "I guess I'll just have to accept that we'll never set eyes on the Proverbs 31 Woman tapestry again."

"What I don't understand is this," said Alice. "If someone's motive is money, how can they collect? Once

we give this information to Chief Edwards, and he passes it along to the FBI, or Interpol or whatever, anyone who puts the tapestry up for auction is going to be arrested.”

“Not if they already know of a private buyer,” said Kate. “I saw it in a movie once. The thief stole a famous statue from a museum, and then he met this rich guy on his private jet and the rich guy gave him a briefcase full of one-thousand-dollar bills for it. The rich guy just wanted it for himself—he had a private gallery in a secret location. I can’t remember what

happened at the end of the movie, but the point is, I think that's possible. Don't you?"

"I suppose so," said Alice. "Or maybe, the person who stole it is an art collector and just wanted it for himself—or herself, and never plans to sell it in any case."

"Which brings us back to my point," said Annie. "I don't have a clue how we're ever going to find the tapestry. It could already be locked away in someone's secret vault or decorating the wall of someone's private gallery. I wonder

if Gram knew how valuable it had become. Do you think that might be why it was hidden away?"

"She might have known," said Alice. "I don't think Betsy ever did anything without some good reason. I just don't know if we'll ever be able to figure out why that tapestry was in her attic."

"Well," said Annie, "it's all moot now. The tapestry is gone. I wish there was some way I could make everything right. I don't know what I would have done with the tapestry, but it's out of my hands now."

That evening, Annie began shutting off the downstairs lights so she could go upstairs to bed, still mulling over the events of the day. It had been her first outing since her accident—she refused to call it anything else—and she had felt energized to be going to Longfellow College for the first time and by the prospect of learning about Lily Cornette. But after processing the information they had gotten from Mabel about Lily and the tapestry,

she was almost certain there was nothing there that would help her catch the thief. It was a dead end.

After Alice and Kate had left Grey Gables, Annie had replaced the Home Song tapestry in its niche in the living room. She didn't care if it was worth thousands of dollars; it was priceless to her. It was a symbol of a friendship between her grandmother and a dear friend, and she made a vow that she would never part with it.

Now, before she started her slow trip up the stairs with her crutches at her sides, she grabbed her tote

bag with Lily's letters still inside and slung the strap over her shoulder. Annie decided that instead of putting Lily's letters back in the boxes with the rest of Gram's correspondence, they deserved a box of their own. Once she was upstairs, she rummaged through the hall closet and found a small box with a lid. Taking the box into the guest room, she set it on the bed and then took the tote bag off her shoulder. She took the letters out of the bag and put them in the box, but then she decided the box

was too plain. She decided to leave it where it was, and the next day, she would look through her collection of decorative papers and find something appropriate to cover the box. Lily's letters deserved to be kept in something special.

Annie set the box on the side table. The muslin pocket that had covered the tapestry still lay on the bed. Annie didn't see any reason to keep it. She thought maybe she would give it to Peggy, who could use the material as a foundation for piecing quilt blocks. It would have to be laundered, so Annie reached

out to pick it up, intending to carry it to the hamper she kept in her bedroom, but when she grabbed at the center of the fabric she heard a noise like paper crinkling.

Annie opened the long edge of the muslin pocket to look inside. There was an envelope that none of them had noticed. When she saw it, she thought her heart would stop. Though the return address was different, the handwriting was familiar, if somewhat shakier than what she had seen before; Annie knew it was a letter from Lily

Cornette. She took the letter out of the envelope and read:

Grace Harbor Hospice

March 15, 1968

Dear Betsy,

It was wonderful to see you this week. I can't tell you how much your visit meant to me. My strength is waning, and I know that it's not likely that we'll ever see each other on this Earth again, but I have the hope of Heaven.

And now, to the purpose of this letter: I had already decided that I wanted you to be the keeper of my final tapestry when I saw you this

week, but I didn't say anything because I didn't want you to be able to refuse it. That is why I had it packaged and sent to you instead.

I know that there is no place for you to display it in Grey Gables, but that's not what I want in any case. My request is that you store it, up in your attic, and someday, when the time is right, do some good with it. I'd like to be able to tell you what that "good" is, but frankly, I don't know. I only know that I have this feeling—no, it's more than that—I

am compelled to make this request.
Only God knows what will come of
it, and I have faith that He will see
it through to its proper conclusion
as He will see me through to mine.

Yours faithfully,
Lily

17

Annie resumed attending the Hook and Needle Club meetings the week following the trip to Longfellow College. She had missed that hour with her friends every Tuesday morning, and it was so much fun to be back in that circle of comfy chairs. Of course, she and Kate and Alice told the others everything they had learned at the college about Lily Cornette and the tapestries she created. Annie brought along the letter that she

discovered in the muslin pocket so the others could read it.

After Alice read the letter, she asked Annie, "Did you notice the letter was written just five days before she died?"

"Yes," said Annie.

"What do you think she meant by 'do some good with it'?" asked Alice.

"I don't know," said Annie. "I don't think she really knew either. I hope whoever has it does something 'good' with it. I guess I'll have to have faith, like Lily did, that God will see it through to its proper

purpose, whatever that is.”

After that meeting, the tapestry ceased to be a topic of conversation among them. It wasn't that they had forgotten about it; they just didn't know what else they could do to try to recover it.

The fact that Mary Beth had finished with her radiation treatments was a cause of celebration at that same meeting, and though they usually avoided bringing food to snack on since that really didn't mesh well with doing needlework, Kate thought the

occasion called for something special, so she brought Mary Beth's favorite kind of cake—Boston Cream Pie—explaining that Vanessa had made it from scratch using the recipe from Kate's grandmother's old Fannie Farmer Cookbook.

After Mary Beth took a bite of the cake, she said, "Yum! I haven't had this in ages, and the prepackaged ones you buy at the store are never as good as one you make at home. I just don't take the time to make something like this for myself. Please thank Vanessa for me, and tell her how much I enjoyed it." She

paused and took another bite of cake, and then another. After a few more bites, she said, "By the way, I wanted to tell you all that I have resumed going to the music rehearsals at the college, so I will be joining the ensemble that is performing before the play begins and during intermission. A couple of people from Stony Point who are part of the ensemble actually came over to my house during my treatments, once or twice a week, so that we could practice together, and that really helped when I

rejoined the larger group. I can report that we sound really good. For us musicians from Stony Point, it's very different music than our usual fare, but Professor Torres is a great conductor, and I think it will add a nice layer of entertainment to the evening."

"I'm looking forward to hearing the ensemble," said Annie. She told the others about the CDs of medieval music she had purchased and how lovely the songs were.

"I can't wait to see the dress rehearsals," said Kate. "It's going to be interesting to see how all the

elements that we've been working on separately come together—the music, the costumes, the set—just everything. It's so exciting!"

Two dress rehearsals were scheduled for King Lemuel's Treasure during the third week of April. The first was to be on Friday of that week, and family and friends of all the citizens of Stony Point who had volunteered their time and talents to the production were invited to see the performance that

evening. Considering how many people had volunteered to help in one way or another, it was expected the theater would be filled to capacity that Friday.

The second dress rehearsal was to be held the following evening for a smaller group. Professor Howell, the Fortescues, and Jacob Martin had invited a few friends and colleagues from New York and Boston, and even farther afield, who were involved in theater. Gwen invited a few key people from various newspapers in the surrounding area as well. It was

hoped favorable articles and reviews would be written about the play in order to bring outsiders to Stony Point for the main performances set to begin Friday of the following week. The goal was as it had ever been—to put on the best production possible, but foremost, to raise money for breast cancer research.

Annie had resumed her duties as prompter a couple of weeks before. Though her leg was still in a cast, someone—usually Ian, who had taken to coming to the rehearsals—

would see her to and from her "little box" under the stage, and she was under strict orders not to make the trek alone. Annie suspected that when Ian couldn't be there, he appointed someone to be her guardian—often Wally. Annie didn't really mind; she was grateful to have friends who were concerned about her welfare. The truth was, every time she approached the stairs that led from backstage down to the area under the stage, she felt a twinge of panic. She suppressed it, but she knew it was there.

She wondered if the police were still investigating the "accident." When she relayed to Chief Edwards the information she had learned about the tapestry and how much it was worth, he wouldn't give her any information, except to tell her it was still under investigation.

At the Hook and Needle Club meeting just before the weekend of the dress rehearsals, Peggy was a bundle of nerves. Mary Beth tried to soothe her. "You are going to be great!"

"Thanks for saying that, Mary

Beth,” said Peggy, “but I get butterflies every time I think about it. It’s been so long since I’ve been on the stage in front of a big audience. I don’t mind the Friday night performance so much—that will be in front of people I know—but it’s the Saturday performance that’s on my mind. It’s going to be those people from New York and Boston. Jacob said there will even be some people from California. ”

“Look, Peggy,” said Alice, “you really are wonderful in your role as Abigail. Just focus on doing what I’ve seen you do for the past two

months at rehearsals, and you'll be just fine."

"Professor Howell says you are a most promising amateur," said Stella, "and that's no faint praise. He wouldn't have given you the part if he didn't think you were up to it. Remember that, Peggy. And remember that your friends are going to be there to support you."

"Thank you, guys," said Peggy, seemingly a little less flustered. "I will remember, and I'll do my very best so that you'll all be proud of me."

Annie reached over and gave Peggy a hug across the shoulders. "You don't have to prove anything to us, Peggy. We already know you've got the right stuff. I can see the headlines now: 'King Lemuel's Treasure Breaks Box-Office Records—Newcomer Peggy Carson Steals the Show!'"

A couple of days before the Friday night dress rehearsal, Annie's original cast had been removed, and the doctor replaced it with one

that he called an "Aircast." It was great! For one thing, she could take it off and actually get into her bathtub. After weeks of "sink baths" it had felt heavenly to be able to soak in the tub again. The other great thing about the cast was that it was a walking cast, so she could finally get rid of her crutches.

The Friday night performance was a smash with the local audience that packed the house that evening. The cast and crew were rewarded with a standing ovation that lasted several minutes. Yes, there were a few hiccups in

the performance, but everyone who was there understood that that was the purpose of the dress rehearsal—to find weaknesses in what Professor Howell had called the “flow” of the production in order to fix them, and to provide the actors with an audience response so they could adjust their performances as needed.

Even though Friday night provided the company a great deal of confidence, on Saturday night, the atmosphere backstage felt quite different from the previous night.

The audience that was waiting in the house seats to watch the play was different too—there were fewer people, and they were much quieter. The “butterflies” that had plagued Peggy returned, and Annie saw her doing deep-breathing exercises when she stopped by the ladies’ dressing room.

Peggy was in her costume and her stage makeup, which made her look like some otherworldly creature close up. “I just stopped by to wish you good luck tonight,” said Annie.

“Annie! Don’t you know you

aren't supposed to say that to an actor before a performance?" asked Peggy with mock indignation. "I think you know what you're supposed to say."

Annie smiled, "Yes, but I was trying to avoid it. Oh, all right—break a leg, Peggy!"

Peggy laughed, "And don't you break another leg, Annie Dawson!"

"That's a deal," said Annie, laughing too. Then Annie said seriously, "You are wonderful in this role, Peggy. We're all so proud of you."

“Thanks, Annie,” Peggy said with a smile. “Now, not to be rude or anything, but please go away before you make me cry—that’s all I need!”

Annie smiled. “OK, I’ll see you later.”

Kate and Vanessa were in the dressing room too, helping with costumes, but they were busy, so Annie just waved to them. Annie had seen Alice, Gwen, and Stella seated with the audience. She knew that Mary Beth was in the orchestra pit with her fellow musicians from Stony Point and Longfellow College

because she could hear the plaintive strains of some ancient melody setting a solemn mood for the beginning of the play.

It was time for Annie to make her way to the prompter's box. Normally Ian was Johnny-on-the-spot, but he was nowhere to be seen this evening. She imagined that with all the VIPs in town, the mayor of Stony Point had to be out in the audience representing his city. She knew she could manage on her own, especially since she had her new walking cast, so she

wasn't concerned. She carried her script, a bottle of water, and a pack of tissues in a messenger-type bag with a long strap she could put across her body and over her shoulder.

As she walked across the busy backstage toward the stairs, she saw Felix nearby. He was as she had often seen him—standing with his electronic device, punching in characters, staring at the screen with great concentration. But her movement caught his attention, and he looked up. He glanced around the area, and not seeing

Ian, said to Annie, "Do you need someone to help you to the prompter's box tonight, Mrs. Dawson."

"Please call me Annie, Felix," said Annie. "You don't need to be so formal with me. And thanks for asking, but I really think I can manage it just fine tonight."

"OK, ... Annie," said Felix. "If you change your mind, let me know. I'll check on you at intermission, so if you decide you need a hand then, I'll be around to help you."

"Thanks again, Felix," said Annie.

"I really appreciate everything you've done to make this production possible. You're a great stage manager. I don't think I've ever known anyone quite so organized. I don't know what the professor will do when you graduate from college this spring."

Felix blushed. Annie supposed he wasn't used to praise. She'd certainly never seen Professor Howell say anything to him that had vaguely resembled it. No, wait, she told herself, the professor had said something nice about Felix when he introduced him at that first

meeting up in the conference room. Still, that wasn't the same as saying "thank you" to someone's face.

"Thanks, Mrs. ... Annie," said Felix awkwardly.

"I'll see you later then," said Annie as she continued on her way.

As she approached the stairs, Annie felt that same twinge of panic that she had felt each time since her leg had been broken. She paused and looked up at the grid. She took a deep breath and slowly let it out. It was safe. There was nothing above the stairs that could

fall down and hit her. She squared her shoulders and began her descent. She took her time going down the steps, and then she hurried across the area under the stage, its dark corners causing a chill to run up her spine. At last, she made it to the small set of steps and up into the box. After taking her seat, she placed the script before her and flipped on her little light.

Soon she heard the piece of music that she knew preceded the beginning of the play. Professor Howell had told the cast and crew

that he intended to say a few words before the play began this evening. Annie saw him walk to center downstage, just as the music stopped.

“Good evening, ladies and gentlemen,” began the professor. “I want to thank you all for coming this evening. The production you are about to witness has a noble purpose. At the behest of our author, Jacob Martin, and thanks to our legion of volunteers, all of the proceeds from the upcoming performances of the play will go

entirely to the National Breast Cancer Foundation. Directing this cast and crew has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my long career. I hope that you will agree with me that this play will take its place along with other great works that speak to our human condition. To paraphrase Oscar Wilde, theater is the greatest of all art forms, the most immediate way we can share with one another the sense of what it is to be a human being. Without further ado, we present to you, King Lemuel's Treasure!

The first act flew by for Annie. The Friday evening dress rehearsal had been laid back compared to this performance. The Friday audience had been family and friends, and it was expected that mistakes would be made. But the atmosphere at the Saturday evening dress rehearsal was completely different. Annie thought she finally really understood what the professor had meant about there being a "flow" to a play.

Tonight she could feel it. It was as if there were an electric current in the air, and it seemed that the others felt it as well. The performances were intense, but not over the top. All of their hard work seemed to be paying off.

At intermission, Annie was ready for a break. She hadn't realized how tense she had been as she watched, and now her joints felt stiff. Felix was nowhere to be seen, so she began to make her way down the steps to the under-stage area. Just as she reached the bottom step, she heard a noise in

the far corner. She just stopped herself from screaming by clapping her hand over her mouth. Trent Bodkin emerged from the shadows, one bare, tattooed arm wrapped around a long box labeled with words along the side that indicated it contained five-foot, 40-watt fluorescent tubes.

Trent stopped and stared at her, but didn't speak. Annie swallowed and tried to sound normal, "Hello, Trent. I didn't realize anyone was down here. You really scared me for a moment there."

He didn't apologize, but just said brusquely, "Had to get this box." Then he stomped across to the stairs that led up to the backstage area, leaving Annie staring after him. When her heart stopped racing, she crossed the space to the stairway herself and climbed them to the backstage area, which was a hive of activity. While the actors were taking a break, the stagehands were busy setting up for the opening scene of the second act. Annie could hear the intermission music rising from the orchestra pit out front.

Annie looked around and just saw Trent as he turned and moved out of her field of vision at the opposite side of the stage. She saw Felix was busy directing traffic behind the scenes. He looked up and saw Annie. "I'm sorry, Mrs. ... Annie," he said. "I was coming to help you, but I got distracted."

"That's all right," said Annie. "I managed."

Felix smiled at her. "I see that." Just then, one of the stagehands approached him and asked him a question; his attention was directed

elsewhere again.

Annie looked at her watch. The intermission was twenty minutes long, and she had fifteen minutes left to go. Her first stop was the backstage ladies restroom. Afterward, she glanced inside the ladies dressing room. It was a bit of a madhouse, so she determined to stay out of their way. She took a slight detour to try to steer clear of some of the activity backstage, and her route took her by the freight elevator. That was the same elevator that she and Wally had used weeks before to take the

tapestry from the workshop up to the fourth floor. Now she saw the box that Trent had carried from under the stage propped against the wall between the elevator door and the swinging door that led to the set of service stairs that also ended in the workshop area. Trent was nowhere in sight.

Annie didn't pause, but continued to head back toward the stairs to make her way below the stage. She felt a rising nervousness about going down the steps again. She was about five feet from the top of

the steps when she just stopped. She felt a sense of panic rising within her. This is ridiculous, she thought. She tried to take a step, but it was as if someone or something were standing directly in front of her, its hand at her neck, stopping her from moving forward. She knew what it was. It was fear.

“Annie! Let me help you down the stairs!”

It was Wally Carson. Annie felt like she must have jumped ten feet in the air and left her heart on the floor.

Wally saw the look on her face.

“Did I startle you, Annie? I’m really sorry. I guess you did all right before the play began. I tried to get back here, but Bill Witherell buttonholed me out in the lobby, and by the time I could get away, the professor was already giving his speech. I guess you were OK?”

Annie took a deep breath, and the fear that had gripped her seemed to fly away. “Yes, Wally, I was all right. But I have to admit, I’m really glad you’re here now.”

Wally offered Annie his arm, and she took it gladly. When she was

safely seated in her little box again, Wally promised he would be back as soon as the last scene ended so that she could join the company for the curtain calls.

The house lights must have already begun to flicker to signal the end of the intermission, because soon Annie heard the medieval melody that had been floating from the orchestra pit come to an end. The curtain opened and the first scene of the second act commenced. All other thoughts not connected with the play stopped for Annie, and once again she was

swept up in the drama of King
Lemuel's Treasure.

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The last word of the final scene had just been spoken, and the stage lights had gone dim when Wally showed up to escort Annie back up to the level of the stage. As they went down the steps from the prompter's box, across the under-stage area, and up the stairs to the backstage, Annie heard the audience applauding. It wasn't as thunderous as it had been the night before, but it was strong and lasting, and she thought she heard

a couple of "bravos" and "bravas" shouted out too. She and Wally watched from one of the wings at the side of the stage, and Annie was glad to see that the audience was on its feet.

When the curtains closed for the final time that evening, Annie went to collect her jacket from the ladies dressing room. Peggy was sitting in front of one of several lighted mirrors removing her stage makeup, and Kate and Vanessa were making sure the costumes and any accessories were back in their proper places, putting aside the

pieces that would need to be cleaned before opening night the following Friday. An after-show party had been arranged by Gwen and John Palmer at Maplehurst Inn, and Annie told Peggy and Kate she would see them there.

The backstage area was starting to clear out as Annie made her way down the side passage that ran from the stage area back to the lobby. Her mind returned to her encounter with Trent at the start of intermission. It just seemed odd. She knew there were at least a

couple of students from the college that were working with him on the light and sound, but shouldn't he have been in the control booth during the performance instead of getting a box of fluorescent lights from under the stage? Something wasn't right.

Annie was still deep in thought when she met Alice in the lobby. "Annie! Wasn't that just the best? The cast really outdid themselves tonight. Stella and Gwen said they'd see us over at Maplehurst Inn."

Annie agreed about the performance that evening and then

said, "I'm just going to make an appearance there, but I don't think I'll be staying very long. I'm exhausted. Besides, it's not like I'm the star of the show or anything."

Catching a look in her friend's eyes, Alice asked, "What is it Annie? Is something wrong?"

"It's just that I had the strangest experience earlier," said Annie. She told Alice about seeing Trent under the stage at intermission.

"That makes no sense," said Alice.

"That's what I was thinking," said

Annie. "I don't like to say this, but it occurs to me that there might have been something in that box besides florescent lights."

"Like what?" asked Alice.

"Like a tapestry, perhaps?" said Annie. "I'm just remembering the way that Trent was handling that box, and then the way it was propped up against the wall by the elevator—it wasn't like it contained anything breakable. And it was the right size to hold the rolled-up tapestry."

"Why don't we just go check out the box?" asked Alice. "If it's still

sitting by the elevator, that is. It should be easy enough to tell if it contains lights or not."

Annie agreed, and the two of them went back down the passage to the backstage area and then to the freight elevator. The box was gone, but they could both hear the sound of the freight elevator as it moved.

Annie looked at Alice. "Do you think it's going up or down?" she asked, referring to the elevator.

Alice listened. "Down I think."

They both looked at the swinging

door to the service stairs and then at each other. Without having to say a word they moved in unison toward the door to the stairs. Annie had almost forgotten her leg was in a cast. "Drat!" she said, "I can't move fast enough down these stairs in this cast."

"Here," said Alice moving close to Annie's side, "put your arm around my shoulders and hang on to the rail. I'll act as a crutch, and you won't need to put your full weight on your broken leg. We should be able to go faster that way."

Alice was right, and the two

women worked their way down the steps fairly rapidly. They listened for the elevator at each level, and quickly moved on down the steps as the slow-moving elevator continued. When they reached the door to the workshop on main floor level, they were both out of breath.

The elevator had already stopped, and they could hear the scrape of metal as someone opened the elevator door. The swinging door from the stairwell contained a small window. The stairwell was lighted, but the workshop was dark,

and both Annie and Alice knew that they wouldn't be able to see anything inside the workshop, but the person from the elevator might be able to see them if they looked through the window. Annie saw a light switch by the door and quickly flicked it to the off position before the elevator door completely opened. Now the stairwell was pitch black except for the faint light that shone into the workshop from the elevator and in turn came in through the small window of the stairwell door.

"Now we just have to hope he

didn't see that," Annie whispered to Alice. The two of them pressed their backs up against the wall behind the door, holding their breath, waiting to see if the door moved.

Apparently the person in the elevator didn't notice that the light had gone out in the stairwell, because after a few seconds, nothing happened. Annie relaxed a little and moved to carefully peek over the edge of the small window just in time to see the very back of a person exit through the outer

door. He had laid the long cardboard box on a large worktable.

“Quick!” said Annie. “He’s gone out the back door. Let’s open the box and see what’s inside.”

Annie and Alice carefully pushed the swinging door and entered the workshop. The only light inside came from the still opened elevator. Even so, Alice was able to find a box cutter on a workbench and cut three sides of one narrow end of the box that was pointed toward the elevator so they could see inside.

Annie pulled back the cardboard

square and looked inside. She gasped and whispered loudly, "Oh my gosh! It's the tapestry!"

Just then, Annie and Alice heard voices outside the back door. They looked at each other's panic-stricken expression in the dim light.

"Hurry! Go back up the stairs and get help," whispered Annie as she pushed the end of the box back in place well enough to disguise that it had been opened. They both knew that going back up the stairs was the only way out. The workshop door into the museum was kept

locked outside of work hours.

"I can't leave you here!" whispered Alice.

"You have to," whispered Annie emphatically. "I'll hide—I'll be fine. Now hurry!"

Alice moved just in time. When the back door opened, and the voices became clearer, the door to the stairs was still swinging slightly. Annie had moved behind the table-saw table, clutching the box cutter in one hand, and sitting on the floor out of sight. Her heart was pounding. She hoped Alice would be all right climbing back up the steps

to the next level; she certainly wouldn't be able to see well or to move very quickly in the darkness of the stairwell.

Annie tried to listen to the voices. She didn't recognize the one that was speaking. "... and after my client has authenticated the tapestry, he'll transfer the funds to your account in the Caymans."

"I can assure you it is the real thing," the other man replied. "I want my money as soon as possible."

Annie nearly gasped out loud

when she heard the other man's voice and put one hand up to cover her mouth. She knew that voice—it was Professor Howell.

"Patience, Rudy," said the stranger. "You'll get your money. I only deal with people I can trust."

Annie couldn't see the man's face, but the irony of his words didn't escape her. What was that saying she'd heard—honor among thieves? As if, she thought.

"I have to get to the party across the street," said the professor. "I'll lock the back door after you and take the elevator back up to the

theater and leave from there."

"Nice doing business with you, professor," said the stranger. "If you come across anything else you want to dispose of, give me a call. You know how to reach me."

Annie heard the professor sniff with disdain. "I doubt very much I will be requiring your services again. This transaction should set me up nicely for my retirement, I think."

"Money doesn't go as far as it used to, Rudy," said the man with a laugh. "Especially for someone with

expensive tastes like yours.”

Annie heard the scraping sound of cardboard being moved across the table. She assumed the man was starting to pick up the box. She hoped she had replaced the cut end of the box well enough so that he wouldn't notice that the box had been opened. What could she do? She couldn't just let him take it. If he got it out that door, she knew she'd never set eyes on the tapestry again. She knew what she had to do. She stood up.

“Stop!” she shouted.

The two men jerked in surprise.

The professor recovered rapidly. "What are you doing here, Mrs. Dawson? How long" His words trailed off, and his eyes narrowed. "You should be across the street at the party. Perhaps I could escort you"

Annie brandished the box cutter she'd held onto when Alice left. "You stay away from me! How could you do something like this? We all trusted you—you're so talented and smart. Why?"

The professor seemed extremely calm to Annie, and she didn't like

that at all. The other man began again to shift the box toward him.

"Stop!" she shouted again. "Alice has gone to get the police, and she'll be back any moment now."

The stranger looked at the professor. "Who is this Alice person? Is she bluffing?" The man left the box on the table and started backing toward the door. "I've got to be going, Rudy. Don't call me, I'll call you."

The professor didn't try to stop the man as he quickly exited the room. Instead, he looked at Annie accusingly. "It appears you have

ruined everything, with your amateurish sleuthing, Mrs. Dawson. How did you come to be here?" he demanded.

"I saw Trent under the stage with the box at intermission, and then I noticed the box leaning by the elevator afterward. It just seemed wrong, so Alice and I returned to check it out, and when we heard the elevator, we came down the stairwell."

The professor laughed bitterly. "Your penchant for noticing details seems to have done me in. It was a

gamble to tell Mr. Bodkin to retrieve the box from under the stage, but I really couldn't be seen doing that myself. He was supposed to do it during the second act, not at intermission."

"Did you know the first time you saw the tapestry at Grey Gables that it was so valuable?" asked Annie.

The professor laughed. "I knew it the moment Mrs. MacFarlane described the signature panel to me. I had seen the Lily Cornette tapestry that hangs in the Emerson Room of Wilson Hall dozens of

times, and I knew what her tapestries had been selling for on the market. All I had to do was get Cyril to send me the photos he took with his cellphone, and relay them to Mr. ... Smith, let's call him, and let him start getting bids from his many clients."

"Does Cyril know how valuable it is?" asked Annie.

"Cyril? Ha!" said the professor. "Cyril is like you—an amateur—he has friends in the art community, but not connections like I have, if you see what I mean. But I couldn't

have him investigating the tapestry. I simply told him I knew of a specialist in the area of fine arts tapestries and convinced him I would get the information for you and pass it along so that he could concentrate on the play.

"That's why he never said anything about it again," said Annie. "He probably thought that you had."

"He thinks he's very clever," said the professor, "but I could always think circles around him." The professor paused. "Except when it came to Dolores, that is. I have to

admit, it was a blow when she chose him instead of me.”

Annie thought back to the interactions she had seen between the professor and the Fortescues; she had been right in thinking they had known each other a long time. Then Annie thought about her injury. Surely that couldn't have been the professor. She didn't want to believe he could do anything like that.

“And the counterweight—was it you that severed the cable?” asked Annie.

The professor looked a little regretful. "I really didn't intend to injure you, Mrs. Dawson. It was meant to be a warning. I didn't want you going to Longfellow and finding out about the other tapestry."

"You could have killed me—or someone else," said Annie.

"The odds favored that it would fall when no one was beneath it," said the professor. "I was willing to take the chance."

Annie couldn't believe what she was hearing. She was about to reply when she heard a noise at the

door of the workshop that was connected to the museum. The door opened, and Chief Edwards burst through first with his pistol drawn, followed by Ian, Wally, and Alice. Ian's glance took in the professor, the box on the table, and the box cutter that Annie still held tightly in her hand.

"Are you all right, Annie?" he asked.

Annie put the box cutter down next to the table saw. "Yes, Ian, I'm all right now."

Chief Edwards had taken out his

handcuffs and approached the professor.

"Is that really necessary?" asked the professor. "I'll come quietly."

"Afraid it is necessary," said the Chief grimly. He stood behind the professor, grabbing his hands and clamping the cuffs over his wrists. "You have the right ..." he began.

While Chief Edwards was reciting to Professor Howell his rights, Annie said, "Alice, did you tell them about the other man. He left just a minute ago."

Ian answered. "Cal Peters was keeping an eye on the parking lot

tonight, just for security's sake. The Chief called him as soon as Alice told us what was going on. The other guy should already be in custody."

Chief Edwards took Professor Howell out through the back door of the workshop to where Officer Peters's patrol car was located in the back parking lot, and Wally locked the outer door behind them.

"What shall we do with the tapestry, Annie?" asked Ian.

"Oh my," she said. "I don't know. Should I take it back to Grey Gables?"

"I'd rather you didn't," said Ian. He paused and thought a moment before continuing. "Only the four of us and the police know that we've retrieved the tapestry. How would you feel if we keep that information just between us until tomorrow? We can lock up the tapestry on the fourth floor—just for tonight. Besides, there's no reason to spoil this night for the cast and crew. If anyone asks, we can just say that the professor became ill, or that we

don't know where he is exactly—which will be true."

Annie was unsure. Things didn't turn out so well the last time she had left the tapestry in the Cultural Center.

"It should be fine here," said Wally. "Only Stella, Trent Bodkin, Bill Witherell, and I have keys."

"Trent Bodkin?" said Annie. "Can he be trusted? He was the one who carried the box from under the stage."

"Trent Bodkin may be a lot of things," said Wally, "but he's not a

thief. If the professor asked him to move the box, he'd do it, but he wouldn't steal for anybody."

Ian agreed. "I know he seems surly most of the time, especially right now, but there's a reason for that. He's an honest man—I can guarantee that."

"What do you mean, 'especially right now'?" asked Annie.

"He's been going through a tough time," said Ian. "I don't want to say too much, but just to help you understand, Trent's wife, Cindy, left him, right after Christmas, and took their two little girls with her. He's

just been beside himself. I know about it because Trent's dad and I are good friends. Anyway, they're trying to work things out and have been going to a marriage councilor. I know the tattoos can be a little off-putting for some people, but I can tell you, he's really a good man."

"Wait," said Alice. "If only the four of you have keys, how did the professor open the back door?"

"I'll bet he borrowed Stella's key," said Wally. "I know he's done that several times. I thought it was for

rehearsals when I'd see him here at odd times, but now we know it was for more than that."

"I'll call the Chief and tell him that the professor has the key to the Cultural Center so we can make sure he doesn't have one anymore," said Ian. "Besides, I don't think Professor Howell is going to be going anywhere this evening besides the county jail. So, are there any other objections to leaving the tapestry up on the fourth floor?"

"I guess not," said Annie. "It should be safe."

“One thing,” said Wally, “I know we can’t tell Peggy tonight—she’d never be able to keep something like that to herself. But tomorrow, when she finds out what happened tonight, I’m gonna need all of you to tell her you made me swear to keep it a secret from her. Otherwise, I’m never going to hear the end of it.”

They all laughed and assured Wally that Peggy would never know that he voluntarily withheld his knowledge of the evening’s events from his wife.

Epilogue

Professor Howell's arrest and the events that led up to it were discussed at length at the Tuesday morning meeting of the Hook and Needle Club. In the end, they all agreed that they were glad they had participated in the production of the play, despite the fact that Professor Howell had turned out to be a thief. They had to admit that, as a director and teacher, he was top drawer. But as a human being, he left a lot to be desired.

That meeting was also the occasion when Mary Beth relayed the results of her most current tests—a mammogram and a CAT scan—after the conclusion of her radiation therapy. There was no indication of any new development of cancer, and the doctor had told her that her cancer appeared to be in full remission. She would have to have regular check-ups and continue her hormone therapy, but Mary Beth said that was a small thing after all she had been through. She thanked her friends for helping her through a difficult time.

In spite of all the drama that had unfolded after the Saturday night dress rehearsal, everyone involved with the play agreed there was no reason to delay the opening night for King Lemuel's Treasure . Thanks to the determination of the cast and crew to pull together, the show went on. The performance was given before a packed house and received a prolonged standing ovation as it had on the evenings of the dress rehearsals. It looked promising that the remaining performances would be sold out,

and that a substantial amount of money would be donated to cancer research.

A reception had been arranged in the museum on the main floor for the cast and crew and their families following the opening-night performance after the audience had cleared the building. Grand Avenue Catering had been engaged to provide finger foods and drinks for the milling crowd. Low music played in the background as people talked and laughed, including all the members of the Hook and Needle Club.

Annie was pleased to have the opportunity to meet Stacy Lewis's parents at the reception. They were a pleasant couple and obviously very proud of their son. Annie hated to think it, let alone say it, but Stacy was right—his mother was a dead ringer for Alice. Annie saw Alice studying Stacy's mother as if she had seen her somewhere before, but just couldn't place her. Annie didn't say a word.

At one point in the evening, while Annie was chatting with Ian, she saw Trent Bodkin across the room

talking to a pretty, petite redhead. Ian told Annie that the redhead was Trent's wife, and she and the children had moved back home earlier that week. Surprisingly to Annie, as she watched Trent, he actually laughed. She saw that he was not always so menacing as she had thought. She smiled as she imagined what Gram would have said: "Just goes to show you, you can't judge a book by its cover." Annie had learned that lesson in spades this last week.

Annie saw Felix talking animatedly to Vera Hartley, one of

the girls from the college who had helped Kate with the costumes. Must be love to turn Felix into a chatterbox, thought Annie with a smile.

Jacob Martin came by with his daughter, Isabelle, to introduce her to Ian and Annie.

"It's very nice to meet you, Isabelle," said Annie. "I've heard a lot about you from your father and your grandparents."

"It's very nice to meet you too, Mrs. Dawson and Mayor Butler," said Isabelle with a maturity that

impressed Annie. "Did Dad tell you that I'm going to be spending most of my summer vacation in Maine? First Dad and I will be spending a couple of weeks with Grandpa Martin, and then when Dad has to go back to California, I'm going to stay with Grammy and Granddad Fortescue."

Annie looked at Jacob, and he smiled in a way that said to her that a breakthrough had been made in his relationship with his in-laws. That was confirmed when Dolores and Cyril joined them.

Dolores wrapped her arm around

her granddaughter's shoulders. "Did Isabelle tell you that she's coming to stay with us a few weeks this summer?"

"Yes," said Annie. "That's wonderful. And I hope you will all come and visit me at Grey Gables. The beach is wonderful in the summer, and I'm sure that Vanessa, Kate's teenage daughter, will be glad to show you around and introduce you to some new friends."

"That sounds great," said Isabelle with enthusiasm. Then looking at her grandparents, she said, "If

that's OK with you guys, that is."

"I think that would be lovely," said Dolores.

"Perfect," said Annie. "I'll be looking forward to it." Annie looked at Cyril and said, "I wanted to thank you again, Cyril, for contacting your friend at the art brokerage in New York. The tapestry is going to be put up for sale next week."

"I was happy to help," said Cyril. "When all is said and done, you'll be a rich woman, Annie."

Annie laughed. "No, I won't be," she said. "Lily Cornette's letter to my grandmother said she wanted

Gram to do some good with it, and it's my intention that that request is fulfilled. I went to see Gordon Proctor—he was my grandmother's attorney—and we're going to use the money to set up The Lily Cornette Foundation. The entity will provide grants to charitable organizations and causes. One of our first donations will be to the Breast Cancer Foundation."

Out of the corner of her eye, Annie saw Stella step up on a small platform and begin clinking a spoon against the side of her glass to get

everyone's attention. In spite of her disappointment with Professor Howell, Stella had maintained her new look with another stylish new dress, her softer hairstyle, and just a touch of makeup. "Ladies and gentlemen! If I can have your attention for one moment please, I have a word or two to say. There's been a great deal of thanks and praise said among us and about us during these past weeks and months that we've been together to put on King Lemuel's Treasure. There's nothing wrong with that. But now, I'd like to propose a toast

to Ophelia Fortescue-Martin. We'd rather have her with us today, but I don't doubt for a moment that she's been our companion in spirit all along. Let's raise our glasses in remembrance and drink a toast to the inspiration she provided to her husband and—through his words—to the rest of us." Stella raised her glass and said, "To Ophelia!"

The rest of the people in the room did the same, and in unison said, "To Ophelia!"

Annie looked across the room at Ophelia's husband, daughter, and

parents, standing together at last, glasses raised and eyes brimming with tears.

She thought of Lily and the Proverbs 31 Woman tapestry. And naturally, her own eyes began to fill with tears as well as her thoughts turned to Gram, who had stored and saved the wealth of the tapestry in the attic for all of those years, faithful to a good friend and mentor. Each of these three amazing women—Ophelia, Lily, and Betsy—epitomized the scriptural icon in her own way. Their paths had crossed in death, but their lives

had brought so much beauty and grace and love and virtue into the world.

So Annie raised her glass too, in honor of three virtuous women, and thanked God that, personally or vicariously, she had come to know and love each of them.