



Murder, She Wrote: Killer in the Kitchen

By Donald Bain, Jessica Fletcher

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A BEEF WITH LEBOEUF

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So when one chef is found with a knife planted in his chest, the other becomes the prime suspect. But there's a long list of those who had a motive to kill in this kitchen war, and it's up to Jessica to uncover who really added murder to the menu.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Jessica Fletcher is a bestselling mystery writer who has a knack for stumbling upon real-life mysteries in her various travels. **Donald Bain**, her longtime collaborator, is the writer of more than one hundred books, many of them bestsellers.

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OTHER BOOKS IN THE *Murder, She Wrote* SERIES

Part One

CABOT COVE INCIDENT REPORT

CABOT COVE SHERIFF'S OFFICE

TOWN OF CABOT COVE, STATE OF MAINE

On April 18 an officer from the Cabot Cove Sheriff's Office was dispatched to the area of the new waterfront restaurant at 23 Old Wharf Road on a 911 assault complaint. Responding officer found a white male lying faceup, apparently dead of wounds from a kitchen knife protruding from his torso. A pool of blood was under the body's left side. The victim was identified as the restaurant's chef and owner. Officer notified Sheriff Metzger, who arrived on the scene at 3:24 a.m.

The medical examiner pronounced the death at 3:43 a.m. The knife was turned over to the state regional crime laboratory and a receipt taken for same. Crime-scene technicians observed a half-empty wine bottle on the counter and two glasses, one with red-colored residue. Four cigarette butts were collected from outside the rear entrance to the kitchen.

A statement was taken from the man who found the body and put in the call. Witness had been taking inventory in the basement after the staff had been dismissed for the night. He said he was not aware of any visitors at that late hour, did not hear any arguments. When he returned upstairs, he found the chef as described. He said the back door was propped open, but no one else was in the kitchen. He admitted that it was not unusual for the back door to the kitchen to be left open to facilitate airing out cooking smells. He said he did not know if the victim had been drinking prior to the incident. He said the victim was not a smoker. He said he could not recall any altercations that might have led to the incident. He provided a list (attached) of kitchen and waitstaff who had been dismissed earlier in the evening.

Deputies were dispatched to notify next of kin.

Sheriff Metzger interviewed the witness who made the 911 call, and released him. State investigators have been assigned to offer mutual aid.

Chapter One

Maureen Metzger, the wife of our sheriff, Mort Metzger, had hosted Thanksgiving dinner and invited a dozen people, including Isabel Fowler. Isabel was a widow who lived alone on the eastern fringe of Cabot Cove. I'd met her when she worked as a dispatcher in the sheriff's office, and we became fast friends. A lifetime Cabot Cove resident, Isabel was a delightful person to be around, always with something good to say about others. She was a volunteer for numerous town charities, some of which I worked for as well, and had a reputation as a superb cook. Every potluck fund-raiser, every holiday celebration at the senior center, every pancake breakfast at the fire station, every annual PTA kickoff dinner, featured dishes provided by Isabel Fowler. And there wasn't a hostess in town who hadn't implored her to share a favorite recipe, requests to which she always complied.

"I was hoping to see Brad and Marcie here today," I said as Isabel and I sat in a corner of the Metzger home, sipping coffee and wondering how many pounds we'd put on at Maureen's dinner table.

Isabel's only child, Bradley, was a handsome thirty-year-old fellow who had spent most of his post-high school years working on the many lobster boats that call the Cabot Cove port home. Lobstering is hard work, and only the hardy manage to make a go of it. I knew that Brad had taken a year off from working the boats to attend a community college with a curriculum designed to prepare students for jobs in the restaurant business, but he had gone back to hauling lobster traps from the deep after earning his certificate. His wife, Marcie, worked as a secretary in the Cabot Cove school superintendent's office and also as a part-time waitress after school.

"They went off to spend the long weekend in Portland with their young friends," Isabel said. "I was invited but didn't want to be the only person at dinner on the wrong side of fifty. When Maureen called, I decided to enjoy this Thanksgiving right here in Cabot Cove with old friends—well, maybe not 'old,' but friends my age."

"I'm delighted that you decided to stay, Isabel," I said. "We haven't had a chance to catch up since last summer's Lobsterfest, when Brad supervised the Down East shore-dinner lobster bake. You know, I always wondered why he never did anything more with the culinary classes he took in college. He's a very good cook. Of course, he had an excellent teacher at home."

A sly smile crossed Isabel's lips. "Promise to keep a secret?" she asked in almost a whisper.

"I'll do my best," I said, "but I promise nothing."

She held her index finger and thumb an inch from each other and continued to speak in the same conspiratorial tone. "Brad and Marcie are this close to getting the funding to open their own restaurant."

"That is exciting news," I said. "I didn't know they had those plans."

"It's always been Brad's dream, but it seemed beyond their ability to come up with enough money to turn it into reality. They're such hard workers and live frugally, saving every penny they can. Marcie has always worked a second job, and Brad is constantly taking on extra shifts with the lobster boats. Still, what they managed to put away wasn't enough to open a place, so I decided to help. I've refinanced my house, and Steven Wagner at the Savings-and-Loan has granted them a sizable loan. They now have enough to go forward."

"That's wonderful," I said, keeping another thought unsaid. It was admirable that Isabel would risk her home—the mortgage for which, I was certain, must have been paid off years ago—to help her son and

daughter-in-law. I wasn't sure it was the most prudent of decisions. I knew from my previous research that owning and operating a restaurant was not only an all-consuming, challenging job, but the failure rate was high.

I had to assume they knew the risks. Certainly, it wasn't my place to throw a wet towel on the idea. Isabel glowed with pride at what Brad was about to undertake. Her being able to help him and his wife go forward with their plan was obviously satisfying to her. I was happy for her.

"Have they decided where their restaurant will be located?" I asked.

"The old Wharf Seafood Shop, on the dock," Isabel replied. "It's an ideal location, with all the summer tourists we attract. Of course, it will take a lot of construction to turn it into the sort of fine-dining spot Brad and Marcie envision, but a lot of restaurant equipment, like ranges and refrigerators, tables and chairs, even napkins and silverware, can be gotten on credit from suppliers."

"That should be helpful," I said.

"Brad is going to feature some of my favorite recipes," Isabel said proudly, "and name them after me on the menu."

Her pleasure was palpable and contagious, and I squeezed her hand and laughed along with her. "I can't wait to be one of their first customers," I said.

We were joined by Seth Hazlitt, the town's beloved physician and my treasured friend.

"Hope I'm not interrupting something important," he said as he lowered himself into a chair next to Isabel. "Has she been filling your ears about the restaurant her son and daughter-in-law are about to open?"

So much for keeping a secret. I looked at Isabel in surprise.

"I guess I have told a few people," she said sheepishly.

"Because you're proud," I said.

"As well you should be," Seth said, "although they're facin' themselves a daunting challenge."

Isabel's face turned serious.

Seth raised a finger to forestall her response. "Don't get me wrong. I love a good restaurant. But with this bein' a seasonal town and all, they'll have to come up with ways to keep the locals comin' when there's six feet of snow. Not an easy task."

"Now, Seth, let's keep a positive outlook. We have other restaurants in town that manage to survive the winter."

"That's all right, Jessica. The kids have been talking about that very thing," Isabel said. "Brad has a lot of good ideas, and Marcie has a wonderful sense of advertising and promotion."

"Then I imagine they'll do just fine." Seth craned his neck to steal a look into the kitchen. "I wonder if Maureen has any more of that pecan pie left. It's one of her better creations."

"Let's go find out," I said. "Would you like a piece, too?" I asked Isabel.

She waved a hand. "I actually have a pecan pie in my refrigerator at home that I made for the kids for when they get back. You two go on. I'm going to talk with Mary-Jane Koser. Her husband, Richard, promised to take photos of the restaurant for our website."

I accompanied Seth to the kitchen, where Maureen and Mort were cleaning up.

"Did I see right that there was a little slice of that pecan pie left?" Seth asked.

"Help yourself, Doc," Mort said, handing him the fork he'd just finished drying. "Save me those extra calories. Maureen really hit a home run with that one, didn't she?"

"Ayuh, it's very good," Seth said as he sat at a small table in a corner of the kitchen and dug into his second dessert.

"I can't take all the credit," Maureen said. "It's Isabel's recipe, practically foolproof. I didn't change a thing. Don't tell her, but I have a few ideas to tweak it a bit the next time I make it."

Maureen had put together an excellent Thanksgiving dinner, including pecan, apple, and cherry pies. She'd stuck to the basics, which wasn't always the case. Her gastronomic creations, especially those that involved "tweaking," too often left something to be desired—I won't use the harsh language that has occasionally spilled from the mouths of Seth and others when evaluating her dishes. Maureen is a dear person and I would never insult her efforts, but considering what a major meal such as Thanksgiving entails, it was nice to see that she'd kept it plain and simple.

"It's exciting about Brad and Marcie Fowler, isn't it?" Maureen said from where she scrubbed a pan.

"Opening a restaurant?" Seth said between mouthfuls.

"Yes. Isabel told me all about it," Maureen said over her shoulder. "Oops! I wasn't supposed to say anything, was I? Don't let on I told you. It's supposed to be a secret."

Seth and I looked at each other and smiled.

"Wonderful pie," Seth said, patting his mouth with a napkin. "Maybe Brad and Marcie Fowler will buy pies from you and sell them at their restaurant."

"Ooh, I like that idea," Maureen said. "There can be a separate page in the menu for 'Pies by Maureen.' What do you think, hon?" She looked at her husband, who'd substituted an apron for his usual sheriff's uniform.

"If you're a big hit, I can retire early," he said.

She playfully slapped him with a dish towel.

"Thanks for a great dinner," Seth said, bringing his plate to the sink. "I've got to get up early tomorrow, so Mrs. Fletcher and I will be toddling along if she still wants to hitch a ride from me."

He drove me home but declined my offer of a nightcap. "Got a full slate of patients tomorrow, including Isabel Fowler," he said.

"Anything serious?" I asked.

“No. Just getting older. I hope her son and his wife know what they’re doing. Restaurants are a tough business.”

“They’ll find out soon enough,” I said.

“I suppose they’ll name the place ‘Brad and Marcie’s,’” he said. “People like to see their own names on the sign out front.”

“Maybe they will,” I said, “but I’m sure they have a long list of other names in mind. The way news travels in Cabot Cove, everyone will be talking about it tomorrow—and throwing out their own suggestions. There’s something wonderful about young people chasing a dream, no matter what the risks. I hope they make a success of it.”

At home I made myself a cup of tea and sat at my desk. It had been a lovely Thanksgiving, full of good food and good conversation with dear friends. What could be better? I thought of the restaurant that Brad and Marcie Fowler would be opening, smiled, and said aloud, “Go for it!”

To want something badly and never take the chance to make it a reality can eat away at people for the rest of their lives. A friend of mine, a psychiatrist, preaches “Any action is better than no action.” They were young and could bounce back should their dream not succeed. I thought of myself and my decision to write my first murder mystery. It was something I’d aspired to for a very long time and finally had decided that if I didn’t try, I’d regret it to my dying day. Fortunately, it had worked out for me, but if it hadn’t, I could have taken comfort in having given it my best effort.

A new restaurant opening, I thought. Cabot Cove was certainly expanding, and I was pleased to see its growth. What *would* Brad and Marcie call their restaurant? The minute they decided, it would be the topic of conversation all over town. Keeping a secret in Cabot Cove was like trying to slam a revolving door.

Chapter Two

I slept later than usual the morning following Thanksgiving dinner at the Metzgers—they say that turkey can have that effect on you—and took my time getting ready for the day. Since I planned to spend the afternoon doing some final editing on the mystery I’d recently completed, I decided to treat myself to a leisurely start to the day, including breakfast at Mara’s Luncheonette on the town dock. A big dinner always seems to make me especially hungry the next morning, and a short stack of Mara’s signature blueberry pancakes was appealing.

A November chill had settled in, which made me debate riding my bicycle into town. Then, too, this was the day after Thanksgiving, when all the shops launch their holiday sales. Traffic would be especially heavy, and I didn’t fancy competing with four wheels while I was on only two. I called the local taxi service, where I had a charge account.

“It’s Black Friday, Mrs. Fletcher. Big shopping day. All our cars are out,” the dispatcher told me.

“Well, do the best you can,” I replied, trying to ignore the rumbling in my stomach.

An hour later, I walked into Mara’s, where an assortment of familiar faces greeted me, including Mayor Jim Shevlin, who was having an early lunch with an aide. He motioned for me to join them, which I happily did.

“Good Thanksgiving, Jessica?” the mayor asked.

“Yes. You?”

“Couldn’t have been better, although I wish this infernal cold snap would end. I could do without an early winter.”

“Issue a decree banning it,” I said playfully. “After all, you *are* the mayor.”

“I just may do that,” he said through a laugh. “By the way, have you heard the news?”

“That you’ve banned an early winter?”

“That we’re about to have a new restaurant in town.”

“You mean Brad and Marcie Fowlers’. Yes. It was a topic of conversation at the Metzgers’ house last night. Brad’s mother was at dinner with us. She told me about the restaurant and swore me to secrecy, but it seemed that everyone there had also been sworn to keep that same secret.”

“Boy, I’d love to bottle Cabot Cove’s rumor mill,” Jim’s aide said. “Make a fortune.”

“It is active,” Jim agreed. “As I understand it, the Fowlers are taking over the old Wharf Seafood Shop. It’ll be nice to see it spruced up and open again. It’s been an eyesore since Ginger and her husband closed down more than a year ago.”

Mara, who’d come to the table to pour coffee refills, overheard the conversation and said, “We don’t need another restaurant in town. Just means more competition for me.”

“No, it doesn’t,” Jim said. “They’ll be opening a real restaurant and—”

“What do you call *this* place, Mr. Mayor?” Mara said, not attempting to keep the pique from her voice. “A fast-food joint?”

“What I mean is—”

“You and the Fowlers will be running two distinctly different types of establishments,” I quickly interjected.

“I hear they’re going to feature a bunch of different lobster dishes,” Mara said, “recipes that Brad’s mother came up with.”

“Isabel is an excellent cook,” Jim Shevlin offered.

“So am I,” Mara said. “I’ve got lobster rolls on the menu and my aunt’s recipe for lobster bisque.”

“And they’re always excellent,” I said, hoping to defuse what was becoming a contentious conversation. “But there’s something you serve that the Fowlers will never be able to duplicate.”

“What’s that?” Mara and Jim asked at the same time.

“No one will ever make better blueberry pancakes than you.” I indicated my now empty plate. “As usual, they were sublime.”

My words seemed to appease her, at least for the moment. As Mara walked away, Shevlin rolled his eyes and smiled. “I hope the Fowlers’ new place doesn’t pit one restaurant owner against another,” he said. “That

would be a shame.”

“I don’t think it will come to that,” I said.

“Brad Fowler’s got a reputation as a hothead,” Jim’s aide said.

“Yeah, but he’s more bark than bite,” Shevlin said.

I appreciated Jim defending Brad, but I didn’t know if that was true. There had been stories about fights Brad had gotten into with fellow lobstermen, and I knew from Mort Metzger that he’d once been locked up overnight after starting a brawl in a local bar. Brad had always been a perfect gentleman around me, but I’d sensed a tautness and tension that hovered not far beneath the surface. Hopefully, his alleged short fuse wouldn’t be on display when the restaurant was open and he had to deal with demanding—and not always polite—customers.

I was about to ask Mara for my check and head home when the subject of our conversation, Brad Fowler, entered. He looked around the luncheonette, spotted me, and headed our way.

“Speak of the devil,” Jim Shevlin said. “Not that we were calling you a devil, but—just a phrase. Sit down and we’ll toast your new restaurant.” Jim held up his coffee cup.

Brad grinned and took the remaining seat. “That’s okay, Mr. Mayor. Seems like everybody in town is talking about me—and Marcie.”

“And where is your lovely wife?” I asked.

“Taking a well-deserved rest. Marcie and I got back late last night. No, make that early this morning. We had Thanksgiving dinner with friends in Portland. We had to get back because we had an appointment at the bank. I’ve never signed so many papers in my life. Mr. Wagner has been great, led us by the hand through the whole loan process.”

“Then it’s settled,” Shevlin said. “You have the loan and are going forward with the restaurant.”

“Looks like it,” Brad said, beaming. I noticed that he’d swapped his usual work clothes for a suit and tie, which testified to his growing maturity.

“My mom says she was with you last night at Thanksgiving dinner,” Brad said to me.

“Yes. That’s how I learned about your plans.”

“We wanted to keep it a secret until the final papers were signed, but Mom is too excited to keep anything under wraps. But yeah, the deal is done.”

“Congratulations to all of you,” I said.

“Marcie says she’s finally going to get to use the lessons she learned at the Culinary Institute.”

“I didn’t know your wife attended the Culinary Institute,” Shevlin said. “I thought you and your mother were the cooks in the family.”

Brad’s face reddened. “She didn’t attend, exactly. It was just a summer course she took between high school and junior college.” He shrugged. “She wanted to stay on, but couldn’t afford it. Those schools cost a

fortune.”

“But between the two of you, you’re starting out with a good foundation,” I said.

Brad shot me a grateful look. “Yeah. I think so, too.”

Mara came to the table and asked whether Brad wanted breakfast.

“Thanks, but I don’t have time. Just a fast cup of coffee. I have to pick up my mom at Doc Hazlitt’s office.”

“How is your mother?” Shevlin asked.

“She hasn’t been feeling well, only you’d never know it by talking to her. Ask her how she is and she always says ‘great.’ I finally got her to admit that she’s been feeling lousy and make the appointment with Doc Hazlitt.”

“She certainly was in good spirits last night at dinner,” I said. “She’s so proud of you and Marcie.”

“We couldn’t have done it without her,” Brad said as Mara brought him his coffee. “It’s a shame my dad isn’t around to see it happen.”

“I’m sure he’ll get the word from somebody up there,” the mayor said.

“That’s good to hear,” said Brad, raising his eyes to the ceiling.

“When will you start renovations?” I asked.

“Marcie and I have already met with the architect who’s drawing up the plans, and Billy Tehar will be doing the construction.”

“Looks like you and Marcie have a busy couple of months ahead of you,” I said. “Do you have a date yet for when you’ll be opening?”

“As close to spring as possible,” he replied. “Tourists start showing up earlier every year, it seems.” He gulped down what was left of his coffee. “Got to run.” He fished for change in his pocket.

“My treat,” I said.

“Okay, so long as you agree that your first cup of coffee in our new place is on me.”

“It’s a deal.”

As Brad started to walk away from the table, Shevlin called after him, “Have you got a name yet?”

Brad turned and nodded. “We’re thinking, maybe, the Fin and Claw,” he said. “Marcie came up with it. Pretty sharp, my wife, isn’t she? See ya.”

“The Fin and Claw,” Shevlin repeated. “Good name. Has a nice ring to it.”

“The Fin and Claw?” Mara said as she came to collect our money. “That’s what they’re calling it? Sounds pretty fancy for Cabot Cove.”

“Cabot Cove is getting fancier all the time,” our mayor said. “A sign of progress.”

Shevlin, his aide, and I exited Mara's into a stiff, frigid breeze off the water.

"Can we give you a lift somewhere?" Jim's aide asked.

"Thank you, no. I'm going to see if I can take advantage of some of these sales before I head back home. Good seeing you both."

They walked toward City Hall, and I headed for Charles Department Store.

The Fin & Claw, I thought as I hunched forward to brace myself against the wind. It did have a nice ring to it.

Chapter Three

The next few weeks flew by.

Christmas decorations were up in all the stores, and a crew had strung tiny colored lights from telephone pole to telephone pole downtown, giving Cabot Cove a festive air despite the overcast sky.

The premature chill of Thanksgiving had given way to a brief thaw, surprisingly mild weather for Maine in December, which lured shoppers out of their homes and gave a boost to the town's retail economy. I'd finished my final edits on my latest novel and proudly sent it off to my publisher, Vaughan Buckley, in New York. Of course my excitement—and relief—at having finished and submitted another novel was tempered with concerns. Would Vaughan and his editors like it? You'd think after all these years I'd have more confidence as a writer. But I'd learned from interacting with other authors that my paranoia was not at all unusual. We all want to be appreciated and dread having our work rejected.

Construction started on the Fin & Claw before Christmas, and the site became a frequent stop for people curious about its progress. The architect's plans called for a complete gutting of the interior, which meant that big trucks dominated the street in front of the pier as workmen hauled out and loaded the rubble onto the truck beds, to be carted away.

I had an appointment one day with Seth Hazlitt—a burn on my hand from being careless in the kitchen—and after he tended to my wound, we strolled downtown to see how things were moving forward. A temporary wall of plywood had been erected to keep people out and the dust in, but Seth spotted Billy Tehar, whose construction company was working the job. "Can we take a look?" Seth called.

Tehar waved us inside. "If you don't mind getting dusty, I'll show you around." He handed us two plastic hard hats. "Just in case."

"Starting from scratch, I see," Seth commented.

"It's the only way to go," Billy said. "Better to clean it out and begin with a clean slate than try to work around existing things. More economical in the end."

"Starting a project like this must be daunting," I commented as Tehar led us around a pile of debris to the back of the space.

"Not a problem if you know what you're doing, Mrs. Fletcher. I have a good crew. They've been with me for a long time."

“Nothing like experience,” Seth said.

“You should know,” Tehar said, laughing. “How many years have you been practicing medicine here in Cabot Cove?”

“Too many to count,” Seth replied.

“Is this where the kitchen will be?” I asked, indicating the rear portion of the rapidly emptying room.

“That’s what the drawings call for,” Tehar said, “only—”

“Only what?” Seth said.

“Well, the plans keep changing.” He didn’t sound happy.

“The architect keeps changing them?” I asked.

“No. His original chart for the space is terrific. He’s designed restaurants before, in Bangor and Portland, and he did one in Montreal last year. He knows what he’s doing.”

“Then—?”

Tehar shook his head. “It’s Brad Fowler, but don’t tell him I said that.”

“What’s *his* problem?” Seth asked, raising his voice to be heard over the sound of hammers and saws and workmen tearing down walls.

“Oh, I shouldn’t be too hard on him,” Tehar said. “This is his first experience with opening a restaurant, and I suppose he’s eager to see it just the way he wants it. But every time he gets a new idea, the cost goes up and the time it takes to get it done gets longer. Nothing is ever simple; when you change one piece, all the other pieces are affected. It’s like tipping over the first domino. I’ve tried to point that out to him, but he’s—well, he tends to be bullheaded about how he sees the picture in his mind.”

We stepped out of the way as two men pushed a cart overflowing with trash toward the front.

“Looks like the young Mr. Fowler could use some good advice about listening to people who know more than he does,” Seth said.

Tehar laughed. “Care to volunteer to pass that message along to him, Doc?”

“Not my concern,” Seth said. “I run into it enough with young physicians who think because they got their MD license they know everything there is to know about medicine. When you’ve been practicing as long as I have and see all the progress being made by research, you learn that not only don’t you know everything, but you know less and less every year.”

“I’ve been treated by one or two of those know-it-alls over the years,” Tehar said. “Luckily, I’m still here.” He helped us navigate the demolition as we returned to the pier.

Seth and I handed him back the hard hats, and I fluffed my hair with my fingers. “Nice to breathe fresh air,” I said.

“A construction site is always dusty,” Tehar said, “but demoing is the worst part.”

“Does Brad often stop in to check on progress?” I asked.

“*Too* often,” Tehar said. “He’s out lobstering today. Better he stays out on the water and leaves the construction to me.”

“What about his wife?” I asked. “Has she been playing an active role in the planning?”

“Marcie? She’s a sweetheart,” Tehar said. “Dealing with her is a pleasure. Brad? Well, like I said, please don’t repeat what I’ve told you.”

The temperature had dropped while we were inside the construction zone, and I pulled my coat collar tighter around my neck.

“I have to get back to the office,” Seth said.

“Don’t let me keep you,” I said.

“Follow my instructions about that burn,” he said, nodding toward my injury. “Try to keep your hand out of water. Get a pair of rubber gloves.”

I’d forgotten about the burn, which Seth had bandaged with gauze. “Yes, sir!” I said. “You go on. I think I’ll stop into Cabot Cove Books and see if they’d like me to sign copies of my last mystery.”

It was midday, and I was pleased to see the bookstore full of holiday shoppers. I spotted Mayor Shevlin and our sheriff poring over a display of new cookbooks and went to say hello.

“We have to stop meeting like this,” said the mayor with a chuckle.

“People will think I’m lobbying you for something,” I said.

“Are you, Jessica?”

“Not today. How are you, Mort?”

“Just fine, Mrs. F. Been out and about?”

I told them about having visited the construction site of Brad and Marcie’s Fowler’s restaurant with Seth.

“Some folks are complaining about the noise,” Mort commented.

“It is noisy,” I agreed, “but the demolition phase will soon be over.”

“Only to start up again,” the mayor said.

I looked quizzically at him.

“Seems like Cabot Cove is on its way to becoming the Down East restaurant capital,” he said.

“What are you talking about, Jim?”

“Mrs. F. hasn’t heard the news,” Mort said, paging through a tome with the celebrity chef Gérard Leboeuf’s face on the cover. “You think Maureen would like this one?”

I read over his shoulder. “The recipes look pretty complicated,” I said. “What haven’t I heard?”

Shevlin laughed. “Hard to believe that the news hasn’t reached you.”

Mort picked up another cookbook. “What about this one?”

“She’ll like that one better. *What* news?”

“Your old pal is about to open a new restaurant.”

“What old pal?”

“Gérard Leboeuf.”

“Where?”

“Here.”

“Leboeuf is opening a restaurant *here*?”

“Yes, *here*.”

“Do I hear an echo?” Mort asked, looking around.

“I don’t know that I’d characterize him as ‘my old pal,’” I said.

“Looks like it’ll go through,” Shevlin said. “I spent a good part of this morning in a meeting with the zoning board. Leboeuf sent two of his attorneys from New York to submit the plans. It’s a pretty ambitious undertaking.”

I had met Gérard Leboeuf years earlier, when I was in New York researching a novel I’d titled *Murder Flambéed*, which I later put aside. The plot just wasn’t gelling. I had been hoping that meeting a famous chef would help me work out the kinks in my story. Our mutual agent, Matt Miller, had introduced us and, after a bit of arm-twisting on Matt’s part, the chef had grudgingly allowed me to peek behind the scenes at one of his restaurants.

“He intends to take over that abandoned warehouse down by the lobster pound and open a French bistro,” Jim continued.

“Wait! That’s right across from where the Fowlers are opening their place,” I said.

“One thing’s for sure,” Mort said, tucking a copy of *Mike Isabella’s Crazy Good Italian* under his arm. “Maureen and I won’t have to go far for a good dinner out.”

My mind was racing, and what I was thinking had nothing to do with how far I would have to go for a meal. I wondered whether Brad and Marcie Fowler knew about Leboeuf’s plans and what it would mean to the success of their own place.

“Anything wrong, Jessica?” Shevlin asked. “You look lost in thought.”

“Wrong? No. I’m just afraid that Mr. Leboeuf’s restaurant will make things difficult for Brad and Marcie Fowler. They don’t have the experience he does, much less the financial backing.”

“That’s free enterprise at work, Mrs. F.,” Mort said.

He was right, of course. Competition could be healthy, prompting competitors to put their best feet forward, which benefits consumers. But Leboeuf was a wealthy and powerful restaurateur, with a string of successful establishments in New York, Las Vegas, Chicago, and other big cities. He had a lot of money behind him and could bide his time until a new restaurant took hold. Stories abounded of his having forced smaller places to close simply by staying open even though his new enterprise lost money. What would he do to the Fowlers’ Fin & Claw? Would it even be possible for them to compete? Would his presence doom their dream?

“Does he ever stay at the palace he built north of town?” the mayor asked, putting down the cookbook he’d been perusing.

“You mean his summer place?” Mort said. “We keep an eye on it, but as far as I know, Mr. Leboeuf and his family hardly ever spend time there. You probably know more than I do, Mrs. F. You’re friends with him.”

“I wouldn’t call it being friends,” I said. “Mr. Leboeuf was good enough to grant me an interview in New York, but we’ve rarely touched base in Cabot Cove. I haven’t seen him since I attended a large cocktail party he held for his business associates last year. If he doesn’t spend much time at his summer home, I suppose it’s because he’s simply too busy running his restaurant empire.”

“His plans for the restaurant didn’t go over too well with the Zoning Commission,” Shevlin said. “His lawyers are asking for a series of variances to the zoning code to allow Leboeuf to put his architect’s plans into action. He wants the kitchen to be large enough to accommodate television cameras and sound equipment.”

“Does the commission really think Cabot Cove can support a new place, along with the Fowlers’?” Mort asked.

Shevlin shrugged. “That remains to be seen. I understand Leboeuf decided to open a place in town because recent legislation that came out of Augusta gives tax breaks to out-of-state companies that bring business to Maine. He’s got himself a sweet deal.”

“Will the Fowlers get a similar ‘sweet deal,’ Jim?” I asked.

“I think it only applies to businesses that come here from another state, Jessica.”

“That hardly seems fair,” I said. “Why shouldn’t local citizens like the Fowlers also benefit from a tax break? Besides, Leboeuf has a home here in Cabot Cove. Why is he considered to be from out of state?”

Shevlin chuckled. “Go ask the legislators up in the state capital. I’ve never been able to figure out half the decisions they come to in Augusta.” Shevlin picked up another book and riffled the pages. “You think Susan would be offended if I bought her a cookbook? I don’t want my wife to think I’m hinting at something.”

“She might prefer a mystery,” Mort said, cocking his head toward me.

“Good idea, Sheriff! Where are your books, Jessica?”

“There’s a pile on the front table,” I said.

“Thanks,” Shevlin said, putting down the cookbook. “Should be interesting to see what develops. At the very least, looks like we’ll all be well fed this summer.” He shook Mort’s hand and gave me a peck on the cheek.

“If I don’t meet up with you again, have a good holiday.”

We wished him the same.

The store manager was delighted to have me sign my latest novel. She set me up at a counter with a pile of books and a roll of SIGNED BY AUTHOR stickers, and I went to work. Mort paid for Maureen’s gift and offered to drive me home, but I declined. When I finished writing my name a dozen times, I took a walk around town, trying to clear my thinking about what I’d learned. Although Mort had been right—competition is usually healthy—I couldn’t shake the feeling that two new restaurants were more than our town could support. Someone was going to be very disappointed, and I had a premonition that something unpleasant was in the wind for Cabot Cove.

Chapter Four

A lot had happened in the years since I’d interviewed Gérard Leboeuf in New York. He and his much younger wife, Eva, a successful model and creator of a popular line of cosmetics, went through with their plan to buy waterfront property in Cabot Cove, on which they’d built a stunning summer house for their family, which also included their by-now twenty-year-old son, Wylie. What Leboeuf termed a “country cottage” was framed in redwood and featured huge, soaring windows that gave them a 360-degree view of their surroundings, particularly the water. A few neighbors had complained to the Zoning Commission that the home partially blocked their own views of the sea, but Leboeuf’s attorneys successfully challenged or settled these complaints, in one case by buying off the neighbor. While the house was a permanent fixture in town, its occupants weren’t.

Users Review

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