

EXCERPT FROM

## Close-Up on Murder

A MURDER, SHE WROTE MYSTERY

*Hollywood has descended on Cabot Cove to make a film based on one of Jessica Fletcher's books. The movie people are clogging up the streets, redecorating Loretta Spiegel's beauty salon, and generally making life miserable for Sheriff Mort Metzger. And then, when art imitates life, and a body is found on the set, Jessica has to find out what drove the killer—and who it is. Here is the beginning of Chapter Two of Close-Up on Murder.*

*Cabot Cove, Maine*

Mort Metzger stuck his head in the door and called to me. "Mrs. F., you've got to do something. This is a disaster!"

"I'll be right with you, Mort," I shouted over the racket of pounding sledgehammers and splintering wood. I turned back to Loretta Spiegel, who clutched my hand tightly.

"I tell you, Jessica, it's very exciting, but I'm not sure about the changes they want," she said. "What if I don't like it in the end?" Loretta looked around as a crew of carpenters dismantled the powder-pink room divider in her beauty salon and shouldered the pieces outside—nearly whacking Mort with a curlicue plank of lumber—then tossed them into a Dumpster. I heard our sheriff dressing down the offending parties in his best former New York City police officer language, which I will not repeat here.

"Didn't the set designer tell you they would put it back exactly the way it was if you didn't like their work?" I asked Loretta.

"Yes, but they're never going to be able to duplicate my fancy openwork panels."

"Why not?" I asked.

"The man who carved them retired years ago. I'm not even certain he's still alive."

"Now, Loretta, I'm sure you'll love the new design. You've been saying for years that you wanted to update the decor in the shop. Here's your opportunity. Not only won't it cost you anything, but they're *paying* you to let them use the shop as a set."

"But it's costing me business, Jessica, not to mention wear and tear on my car. Since this place is being torn apart I've had to run all over town to do customers' hair in their homes. You

try washing Ideal Malloy's hair in her kitchen sink. She dripped all over the floor. I nearly threw my back out getting her into a chair."

"Mrs. F.! Please," Mort said, stepping into the construction zone.

"Yes, Mort. Just give me a minute."

"I don't have a minute. And there won't be a hair left on my head if you don't corral these movie people. They're causing more traffic jams than the Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade and the president's visit to the UN combined."

"Looking to get yourself a manicure and pedicure, Sheriff?" a carpenter quipped as he manhandled one of Loretta's hair dryers out the door.

"Oh, for the love of . . ." Mort said. "I'll be outside."

"Loretta, try to be patient just a little longer," I said. "I'm sure the shop will be spectacular when they're done."

"But they're making everything black and white," she said. "I was thinking of something more along the line of aqua, you know, to give the shop a spa vibe. All the elegant beauty salons on TV use this stunning color. It's somewhere between Seafoam and Tropical Paradise. Those are the paint colors I had picked out at the hardware store."

"Why don't you talk to the set designer the next time she comes in and tell her how you'd like it to look when they're finished filming?"

Loretta contemplated that idea as her eyes scanned the interior of her shop. "All right," she said. "I guess I can do that."

I could practically hear the wheels turning as she pictured the changes she wanted made. "If they were going to put it back the way it was," she murmured more to herself than to me, "I'll just have to convince them to put it back the way I want it."

"Exactly! And I'm sure you'll succeed," I said, patting her arm. "You're very persuasive. Now, I'd better go before Mort arrests the whole carpentry crew."

I stepped outside Loretta's salon into the bright sunshine to find Mort nervously combing his hair with his fingers and fanning his face with his Stetson. "I'm sorry, Mort," I said. "Loretta needed a bit of hand-holding. She and the set designer have different opinions on how a small-town beauty shop should look. I thought it looked fine just the way it was, but they have other

ideas.”

“I’m not surprised,” he said, escorting me to his patrol car, where the passenger door stood open.

I climbed in.

Mort shut the door, circled around the back of the car, and took his seat behind the wheel, tamping down his hat so that it sat low over his eyes.

“Have you spoken to the director yet?” I asked.

“These movie people don’t have the slightest idea what goes on in a small town, and they don’t care,” Mort said, ignoring my question. “They have me closing streets left and right so they can film and then they don’t show up for hours, if at all. The merchants are screaming that their customers can’t get into their shops. The mayor won’t talk to the big shots at the film company because he says they’re bringing lots of business to town. I’d like to see where. They have a caterer, so they don’t much use the local restaurants. They brought their own woodworkers. They should’ve brought their own police. I had to hire on two more deputies just to direct traffic. Not to mention the fact that most of them aren’t even staying in town. They’re living in trailers out at the airport. How does *that* benefit Cabot Cove?”

“But, Mort, we don’t really have any hotels apart from the Blueberry Hill Inn and a few bed-and-breakfast places. Lots of people in town are renting rooms to the crew, including me. I have a young lady staying in my spare bedroom.”

“That may be, but the shopkeepers keep dialing nine-one-one when they can’t get their cars out at lunchtime, and your director is never available when I call to find out when they’ll be finished for the day.”

“My director? I don’t know what you expect me to do. I don’t have any influence. I barely know these people.”

“You know them better than I do.” He reached into his pocket and popped an antacid into his mouth.

“Are you okay?” I asked.

“My stomach has been doing somersaults ever since they rolled into town,” he replied, “and this time it isn’t Maureen’s cooking.”