

EXCERPT FROM

## **Murder On Parade**

A MURDER, SHE WROTE MYSTERY

*Following the Cabot Cove Fourth of July festivities and fireworks, Jessica decides a walk is in order. Joining her are former Cabot Cove Sheriff Amos Tupper, back for a visit, and Rick Allcott, an FBI officer, now retired, whom she had met several years ago at a crime conference.*

We left the parking lot and strolled back to where we'd witnessed the concert and fireworks. There were still a few stragglers sitting in their chairs or on their blankets, evidently not wanting to end the evening either. The band's "roadies" were busy breaking down the equipment on the stage, and members of Cabot Cove's sanitation department had begun their cleanup work. I spotted Mort Metzger issuing orders to some of his uniformed officers, and we went to him.

"Quite a show, huh?" Mort said after dismissing his men.

"Spectacular," Amos agreed.

"What are you folks still doing here?" our sheriff asked.

"Walking off fried chicken," I said.

"I never had a chance to have dinner," Mort said, eyes scanning the diminishing activity. "Fried chicken sounds pretty good just about now." He waved his arms in the air. "Hey, kids, get away from those wires on that stage." He hurried off to keep several youngsters out of harm's way. I hoped he'd be able to get home soon and grab some dinner.

Rick Allcott, Amos Tupper and I walked down to the water's edge and strolled along, away from the Lennon-Diversified building. Light from a waning crescent moon danced off ripples in the water. Because we were outside town and its downtown lights, the sky was especially clear, millions of stars shining against an almost black scrim.

"Miss being sheriff here?" Rick asked Amos.

"Once in a while," said our former top law enforcement official, "but I get to travel some. Keeps me from being bored. Went on a safari tour to Africa coupla months ago with the senior center."

"Amos! How exciting," I said.

"*Ayuh*. It was."

"Always wanted to visit Africa," Rick said. "Sounds like an ideal retired life."

"Also do some bass fishing, and some woodworking."

"That's right," I said. "I'd forgotten that you'd started building furniture when you were here, Amos."

"I really enjoy it," he said with a gentle laugh. "I love the feel of the wood and the look of the grain. Then again, Miz Fletcher, I sure do miss the people in Cabot Cove. Finest bunch of people I've ever known. It was good to see Doc Hazlitt feelin' better."

"He's a trouper," I said.

"How about you, Allcott? You miss being an FBI agent?" Amos said. "You seem a little young for retirement."

"I put in my years," Rick said. "Sometimes I miss the action, but on peaceful nights like tonight, I remember what I enjoy most about being retired, Peace! There wasn't a lot of it when I was with the Bureau. Nothing like in Cabot Cove. I can understand why you choose to live here, Jessica."

"It's my little slice of heaven."

"Even with the growth, and the changes that come along with it?" Rick asked.

"Even with that," I said.

I estimate that we'd gone almost half a mile before Amos suggested we turn back. Now, we were walking toward the Lennon-Diversified building, whose marble façade caught the moonlight, giving it an ethereal aura, like some religious temple in another part of the world, or an imposing marble government building in Washington, D.C., home of many such edifices.

"Anyone care for a cup of coffee or tea back at my house?" I asked.

"Sounds good to me," Amos said.

"Count me in," said Rick.

As we started up the gentle hill toward the lot where Amos and Rick had parked, we heard the sound of sirens.

"Some fool must'a had too much to drink and wrapped himself around a pole," Amos offered.

"Or around someone else's car," Rick said.

"Oh, dear," I said. "I hope not."

The sound came closer, two sirens now. We were within a hundred feet of Rick's car when flashing lights came into view. A few seconds later, their source became evident as two marked cars raced down into the lot from the road. One was Mort Metzger's sheriff's vehicle. They came to a halt a dozen feet away, and Mort and three deputies exited.

"What's going on?" I said.

"Got a report of a body down behind Lennon's building," Mort said.

"We were just down near there," I said.

"Did you see anyone?"

"No," we chorused.

Mort led his men down the hill. We didn't make a conscious decision to follow them. Amos, Rick and I simply fell in line, our reflexes on auto-pilot. We saw the men disappear around the rear of the office building where exterior

lights had come to life, bathing the sweeping veranda, promenade and dock in harsh, white light. Two people stood together on the dock as Mort and his officers narrowed the distance between them. We stopped a respectful distance away, but close enough to hear what was said. I recognized one of the men awaiting the sheriff's arrival by his uniform, a Lennon-Diversified security guard. The other person was the young man, Dante, who seemed always to be at Cynthia Welch's side.

"Where?" Mort asked in a loud voice.

"Down there," the guard replied.

They all headed in the direction indicated by the guard, the far end of the dock. We moved with them.

"Right there!" the guard announced, and pointed toward the water.

Flashlights were trained on the object of their focus, and we strained to see what it was. We knew it was a body, of course, because Mort had said it was. The question was: whose body was it?

After a few seconds, Mort retraced his steps in our direction.

"Who is it?" I asked.

"Is he dead, Sheriff?" Amos asked.

"Afraid so," Mort responded.