

Chapter 6

Wednesday afternoon, June 15
A graveside service

Heather and I stood back a row until the service began. We were on the same side as the Brown family — Imogene, her husband Larry, her daughters Rachel, Leah and Zorah, her parents, her husband's parents and friends.

My mom wore a long gray skirt and a black top. I wore a gray top and a navy blue skirt. Heather put on my full black dress and Anna dressed in a black suit and a yellow blouse.

I was relieved that Mark's parents tolerated our presence without a fuss, though Imogene stared daggers at me once.

Most seniors, teachers and coaches were here plus several juniors and a few sophomores. The football team sat together in the front row bleachers that had been erected. Melissa, Madison and Jody sat with Heather and me. Detective Williams stood nearby and kept a watchful eye on the proceedings. A police officer stood near Imogene's family.

A cool wind came up just as eight ball players carried the casket to the gravesite. A hush fell across the crowd. Ever so carefully, they positioned the casket over Mark's resting place. They then walked to their respective seats with the team.

I held my tears early on, but when a young black woman sang *Amazing Grace* I cried. I wasn't the only one. Almost every female cried through the rest of the service.

A Presbyterian minister walked to the mother and comforted her. He read from the Bible to her and her husband. Then he stepped back to the casket. He talked about how bad it was to lose a young person and that Mark's dad would gladly switch places with his son if he could.

The minister read splendidly from the bible as Imogene wept loudly.

I began to cry again.

Heather sobbed.

Madison cried too.

When the minister finished praying he walked to the mother and gave her the Bible he used — Mark's Bible — and stood near her.

Rachel stepped forward and put a wreath of fresh white flowers on the casket. She wore long brown braids. She was the oldest daughter.

Leah stepped forward and placed many fresh flowers on the casket. She also wore long brown braids.

The middle school girls wore dark blue suits with short skirts and green pastel blouses.

Little Zorah stepped forward. She emotionally kissed a bunch of red roses and tossed them onto the casket. She began to cry.

Rachel and Leah comforted her and helped her get back to the family.

Everyone was in tears.

I stepped close to the casket and laid a red rose on it. Then I prayed for Mark.

Heather joined me. She placed a yellow rose on the casket.

Madison, Jody and Melissa stepped close to the casket. Each one placed flowers on the casket.

We didn't want to cause a fuss so the five of us returned to our place in the crowd.

When people began to leave Heather and I walked to Allison's auto.

"It was a nice service," said Anna.

"Very," said Allison.

Anna has recently cropped her red hair and had her hair stylist bleached it blonde. She has green eyes and looks good. Our moms look great together.

On Monday Heather and Lindsay removed the paint from Albertsons parking lot. Madison helped. Lindsay found her pumps, but Heather's heels were missing. Anna replaced the lost pumps with more practical everyday brown shoes.

Mom let Anna and Heather out at their house.

"Would you like to come in?" asked Anna.

"No thanks," replied mom. "Maybe later in the week."

Allison and Lindsay went home.

"Would you like to eat supper out, Lindsay?"

“Sure.”

Mom is like that. If dad is away working she likes to go uptown to dine.

I went to my room and removed my skirt and top. I decided to put on black jeans and a light red blouse.

Ding.

“I’ll get it,” Lindsay said.

She raced to the door and opened it. Lindsay was taken aback when she saw the detective, the attorney and a policewoman.

“Hello,” said Lindsay.

“Is your mom here,” said Detective Williams.”

“Yes. Please come in.”

The men knew where to go. The officer followed.

When mom came into the living room, the men got up. Mom had changed into black slacks and a silky green top with long sleeves.

Mom sat next to me on the sofa.

“I’ll get right to the reason why we’re here,” said the detective.

“Please do,” said the attorney.

“I have preliminary results from the autopsy and the toxicology lab.”

He looked at me and then he looked at mom.”

“What?” queried mom.

“The cause of Clark Weber’s demise was a stimulant.”

“The only stimulant we took was coffee,” Lindsay explained.

“Hypoxia set in. Then arrhythmia and ischemia,” continued detective Williams.”

He saw Lindsay’s blank look.

“It means he was short of oxygen. Sudden cardiac arrhythmia leads to ischemia without emergency care. It means his heart rate was erratic and fibrillated. He had some alcohol in his system. The alcohol, stimulant and very little exercise were a lethal combination for him. He had a congenital defect in his heart. Are you familiar with heart conduction?”

“No,” answered Lindsay.

“We think he had an acute problem with conduction. Then everything fell as a row of dominos would.”

“What is conduction?” asked Allison.

“The heart has a sinus atrial node that feeds an atrial ventricular node. The signal branches out much as tree roots do, to other locations of the heart. Arrhythmia in the atrial ventricular node causes an irregular heartbeat and fibrillation. A glycoside causes trouble with conduction. If you don’t understand everything have your doctor explain it to you.”

“Thank you. He was going to play football at the University of Washington,” Lindsay said.

“Clark may have gone through life without a problem. We don’t know. Training may have been too much for him.”

Was he conscious when he fell?”

“I don’t think so.”

Lindsay had so many questions, but nothing came out of her mouth.

“Was the coffee enough to kill him?” asked Allison.

“We don’t think so, Mrs. Britton. The lab is running more tests. We think he had a glycoside in his system.”

“What is a glycoside?” asked I.

“A powerful stimulant. In the presence of a congenital defect it leads to a quick death. We may have a matter of murder on our hands.”

His last statement shocked Lindsay’s being.

“How did it happen and where?” she asked as her mind cleared.

“That, Lindsay, is the same questions I asked myself.”

The detective assumed a deadly serious stance.

“Mark’s mother believes you put a glycoside in his coffee.”

“Well,” Lindsay said. “How in the world did she conclude that? I liked Mark. He was a right nice person. I can’t fathom anyone who would want to harm him. Actually, I don’t understand what a glycoside is and I’m hurt that Imogene would think I could hurt Mark or anyone else for that matter,” Lindsay concluded while holding eye contact with the detective.

Mother took my hands in hers.

“Lindsay wouldn’t harm a bee,” said mom.

“I might want to if it bit me,” said detective Williams.

Everyone laughed heartily.

“I don’t believe Lindsay did it,” said the detective meaningfully.

He smiled warmly.

“Mrs. Weber has created a stink at the police department.”

Lindsay listened intently.

“Mrs. Britton?”

“Yes.”

“Would you object if Officer Sherri Case and I look around the property?”

“Carl?” asked mom.

“It’s better than having them get a search warrant.”

“Is this okay with you Lindsay?”

I love mom in so many ways. She always includes me and values what I say.

“Fine,” I said.

“Thank you,” said Sherri.

The detective, the attorney and Sherri started in Lindsay’s room first.

She watched for a while. They looked in her closet, in her shoes, hats, the pages of her books, under the bed, in the pockets and seams of her clothes and at any item that would open or come apart, as her hair dryer for instance.

Sherri showed the condoms Lindsay had in her bag to Allison.”

“Lindsay isn’t sexually active. She’s going to college in August. I gave them to her so as to prevent a pregnancy.”

“Thank you,” said the officer.

“You’re welcome.”

“I’m getting hungry,” Lindsay whispered.

“Would anyone be interested in pizza and soft drinks?” asked mom.

“That would be kind of you,” said Sherri.

“Yes,” said the detective.

It was six o’clock when we started on three pizzas.

“We finished with Lindsay’s room,” said the officer. “It’s clean. With your permission I’ll begin on the rest of the house.”

Lindsay and her mom watched TV after the authorities finished looking around the living room.

“Phil would have had a fit,” said Allison softly.

“Yes,” Lindsay replied.

“I’m not going to tell him.”

“Okay. I won’t either.”

Around ten Lindsay and Allison fell asleep.

Mrs. Britton? Mrs. Britton?”

Mom and her daughter woke up.

“We have finished,” said Detective Williams. “We found nothing other than ordinary things.”

“I’m glad,” said Allison.

“Yes,” Lindsay added.

“Would there be an aunt, uncle or grandparents who Lindsay could visit for a while?”

“I don’t know right off hand,” said Allison. “Is Lindsay in some sort of danger?”

“No, I’m certain Lindsay had nothing to do with the crime. But Imogene is a rabble rouser. Have you heard the expression a tempest in a teapot?”

Mom waited for Lindsay to answer.

“Yes, as in quite a stir,” Lindsay said.

“Have you read the book or seen the movie *The Tempest*?”

Mom smiled.

“Yes, I have in mom’s literature class,” replied Lindsay. “It’s Shakespearean. I saw the movie too.”

“What happened in respect to the tempest in the teapot?”

“Near the end of the movie, the protagonist started a violent storm to capsize a boat. People were hurt. In Shakespeare’s play Prospero¹ used his magic to capsize a boat. Further he magically caused the people to make it to the island safely.”

“If Prospero had been a woman, he might have been accused of what? It rhymes with craft.”

“Witchcraft!”

“Yes,” Lindsay. “The point I mean to present is that Imogene is fuming. If we were living in 1692 in Salem, Massachusetts, I believe Imogene would have you, Heather, Madison and most of the senior women up for a witchcraft trial.”

“You mean she wants vigilante justice?” asked Allison.

“For the present she does,” replied the detective. “She’s hired two private detectives. I hope they talk some sense into her.”

¹ The Tempest by William Shakespeare.

“And if this was Salem in 1692 Imogene is the type who would make up stories or anything she could to incriminate Heather and I?”

“Yes, Lindsay.”

“Thousands of women perished in witch hunts in Scotland.”

“Yes, I know,” replied the detective.

“So Imogene would rather watch a woman burn at the stake than admit she was wrong?”

“Figuratively,” yes. In her state of mind you are guilty.”

“Honey, I think Detective Williams means Mrs. Weber has it fixed in her mind that you’re guilty simply because you and Clark sat close to Mark. Heather was at the same table.”

“I understand,” I replied. “So you think we should be out of sight, out of mind.”

“Precisely,” stated the detective.

“We’ll think about it,” said Allison.”

“Can Heather and Madison go with me?”

“Don’t say anything to Heather yet,” answered Detective Williams. “We’re going to search her house tomorrow afternoon.”

“My mouth is sealed.”

Allison grinned.

The detective, attorney and officer filed out of the house.

“I don’t know what to think about Mrs. Brown, mom?”

“She acts as a wounded animal does. Come. Let’s eat a snack. Maybe you would like some ice cream and cake?”

“Okay.”

“You can sleep with me tonight if you want to, Lindsay.”

“Alright, mom. Can we eat in bed?”

“Okay.”

“Terrific!”