



CHAPTER FIFTEEN

George in Custody

Why did the Sothic Solar sketch have a faint imprint of a white supremacy symbol on it? Although the imprint wasn't sharp and it was barely visible, there's no doubt about what it was. I thought about the military medal Liam Briggs handed me during June Fest. I recalled the shape of the eagle, the positioning of the swastika. In my mind's eye, this tracing would match the medal. Is it an image the solar company CEO was hiding in plain sight on his stationery?

I put the arts-and-crafts box back on the shelf in my junk closet. Then I took the draft blueprint and tracing with me to the kitchen. I sat at the breakfast nook, chin resting against my steeped fingers, staring at the eagle tracing. Liam may be secretive, but I couldn't wrap my head around him being a current white supremacist.

Wolf lay on his dog bed, his snout resting on his front paws. He raised his head, cocking it slightly from side to side as I spoke to him.

"Wolf, you're my listening post when I can't confide in anyone else. Am I wrong to wonder about Liam's potential connection to white supremacy? His response when we were painting at Habitat yesterday was weird. What if he was following me on the way home last night?" Wolf's eyes closed as I rambled. "He's starting a new business and doesn't want publicity. His crew says he hasn't been himself lately. He was friends with Larry, and they were both part of that radical group. And they were together this morning." I stopped talking for a moment as my brain shifted gears. "I wonder if he had access to epinephrine, but even if he did, what would be his motive to attack Ted?"

With a little whimper, Wolf again tilted his head.

"Am I boring you?" A talk wag suggested the answer was yes. "Okay, let's take a walk to the apiary."

Weatherwise, it was a perfect June day in Wisconsin. Comfortable temperature with low humidity. A few clouds danced in the sky, sometimes blocking the sun, and sometimes letting the rays shine through. Wolf chased an occasional squirrel or rabbit as he sprinted ahead or trailed behind.

I sat on a boulder near the edge of the property. I contemplated the traced swastika as I gazed at Minnesota on the distant horizon. Was it connected with Ted's murder? I needed to talk to someone grounded and prudent, someone with sound judgment, someone who is the soul of logic. Who better than the local psychic Luna?



It was mid-afternoon when I pulled into the Sunflower Café parking lot. My growling stomach reminded me I hadn't eaten yet that day. I could have lunch and get Luna's advice at the same time.

I grabbed the Sothic Solar rough drawing and the pencil tracing and walked toward the building.

Luna waved as soon as I walked in. She pointed toward an outside table under an umbrella in the corner and mouthed, "The usual?"

I nodded.

A few minutes later, Luna brought out my preferred lunch sandwich and a water flask for herself. She slid into the chair across from me. "The lunch rush is winding down. Sam and Roxie can handle things now. What did you want to show me?"

"How did you know I wanted to show you something?"

With an enigmatic expression, Luna placed her ringed-fingered hand on top of my papers. "Sweetie, I always try to be observant."

I turned over the Sothic Solar sketch and the tracing paper with the eagle swastika. "I have no proof this impression is the same as what was on the medal Liam gave to me. But the similarity is too strong to ignore."

Luna studied the items I had placed on the table. "This doesn't look like a watermark to me. It looks more like an accidental crease. And maybe I'm responsible. Was the sketch on top of your desk?"

I nodded.

"I didn't pay attention to where I set your book down when I returned it. You know your desk is a mess." She grinned at me. "Anyway, I think the pressure of the book may have caused the medal to leave an imprint on Liam's sketch."

My face warmed with a blush as I caressed the document. Was I creating clues that didn't exist? "Did I tell you what Liam said when we were painting at the Habitat for Humanity house? He told me he joined the service to fight alongside people who looked like him. People who looked like him!"

"It may have been a careless thing to say, but it doesn't mean he's operating a secret society with a Nazi watermark under the guise of a solar company."

My stomach growled as I contemplated the evidence against the owner of Sothic Solar. "Liam tried awfully hard to stress that he had been on Ted's property and not in Gaia when Ted died." I took a bite of the sandwich. "Did you know Liam refused publicity for his business? Felicity wanted to do the standard new-business article for Sothic Solar, but Liam turned her down. Who does that?"

"Is the company honoring its commitment to installing solar panels on your warehouse?"

I nodded. "His crew is working, and as far as I can tell, it's going according to schedule, at least as far as I can determine after only two days. But something about the way his work supervisor answered my question about future company projects had me wondering."

"What do you mean?"

"It was almost as if they didn't know whether Sothic Solar would still employ them for new jobs after completing my installation. It was almost as if the company was a front for something else."

Luna gave a half-hearted shrug. "What did you learn when you were at Ted's this morning?"

"Liam seemed to be angry at Larry. Like they were on opposite sides of an argument." I took another bite of my lunch before it hit me. "How did you know where I was this morning? Did Nika or Felicity talk to you?"

"If Liam and Larry are in disagreement," Luna said, avoiding my question, "it would help if we knew what the discord was about."

I swallowed the last of the sandwich, feeling a bit of remorse creeping in. Just because I wanted to prove George's innocence didn't give me the right to throw somebody else under the bus. "You're right. I'm jumping to conclusions without proof. I just hope we can find all the pieces we need."

Back in my car, I again remembered that Luna knew about my trip to Ted's without me telling her. Could she really be psychic?



Dot Harrison was sipping mead on the patio when I arrived back at Bliss Creek. Today she was wearing a butterfly floral print top over a bohemian skirt hinting at a hippie style from decades past. The clothes were not too tight, and her make-up was subdued. It wasn't the cacophony of styles she usually wore. Odd.

I groaned inwardly as I greeted her. "Do you have more ideas for our promotion, Dot?"

"I wanted to sample the exact mead that would carry my name. Thought it would stimulate my brain cells." She tapped against her temple before sipping gingerly with her eyes closed. After another sip, she opened her eyes. "Harrison Honey Mead, using my last name rather than my first."

Never mind that *honey mead* is redundant, since mead is, by definition, made from fermented honey. And the name is rather bland. But it's better than some of the other monikers she's dreamed up. "Maybe we could focus on the wildflowers that are most prevalent in your garden."

"Ya know, I was thinking about changing the name of my business to take advantage of our co-promotion." Her face beaming, she slid a sheet of paper toward me that contained a list of names.

- *Wildflower Trails*
- *Cozy Cosmos*
- *Mystic Moonlight*
- *Prairie Wildflower*
- *Wildflower Blossom*
- *Blissful Meadows*
- *Honeybee Haven*
- "Don't ya think these are cute? Honeybee Haven is a natural to connect to the mead. Blissful Meadows kinda builds on Bliss Creek Winery, and Meadows suggests wildflowers. What do ya think?"

I had to admit the names were improvements over Harrison Bed-and Breakfast, and they did offer an opportunity to connect with a new mead.

I opened my mouth to comment, but Dot continued. "Cozy Cosmos is interesting. Cosmos flowers are supposed to represent balance and tranquility. According to folklore, the flowers attract fairies. Maybe we could show fairies and bees flying together."

"Dot, it's clear you've been digging into this. Wow." I was impressed, and edged toward embracing Dot as a business co-promoter.

Dot savored the drink in her hands, swaying to an inaudible tune. "Hibiscus. Good for tea, now that I've gone organic. That should work for honey, too, don't ya think?"

Organic? Maybe I made a convert out of her.

She set her glass down. "What's new with Ted's murder investigation? I heard about George being arrested. My friend Martha—she works at the town hall office—told me he's in custody."

"What? Nika would have—" I grabbed my mobile. Son of a nutcracker! My phone was still turned off from my interview with Felicity. I turned it on. Several text messages popped up. I had missed two calls from Nika, and one each from Josh and Tiffany.

"Martha said the fed guys found George and Cathy holed up in some camp site."

"Dot, they weren't *'holed up.'* They were camping. They were on vacation."

She shrugged.

How could she be so nonchalant? "Excuse me. I need to call the sheriff."

On the way through the retail section to my office, I stopped to brief Sasha, causing her to drop the rag she was using to wipe down the bar. She looked as shell-shocked as I felt.

Nika answered on the first ring. "Was your phone off again?"

"Yeah, sorry. Have you talked to George?"

"Thielker won't let me. They found more Nazi artifacts in George's house and a couple of on-line searches about RogueWave. They also found a replica of a Third Reich coin in his trash can."

"Any Epi-Pens or other tools for administering epinephrine?"

"Not that I've been told, but I'm no longer in the inner circle."

"What now?"

"Cathy is trying to get George a lawyer."

"Is Thielker looking for other suspects?"

"I don't know that, either." Soft metallic snapping came through the speaker, perhaps from Nika's pen. She had a habit of clicking it when frustrated. Slow and steady—not rapid and annoying like Thielker. "Have you heard from Mariama?"

"No. Do you think she might be a suspect?"

"I didn't say that. They've kept me in the dark, just like I said." More clicks came through the phone, faster this time. I suspected there was more to her question about Mariama contacting me than she could let on. "But I'll share as much with you as I can."

We ended the call, and I returned to the tasting bar. Sasha looked expectantly at me.

"No good news," I said. "Cathy's looking for a lawyer."