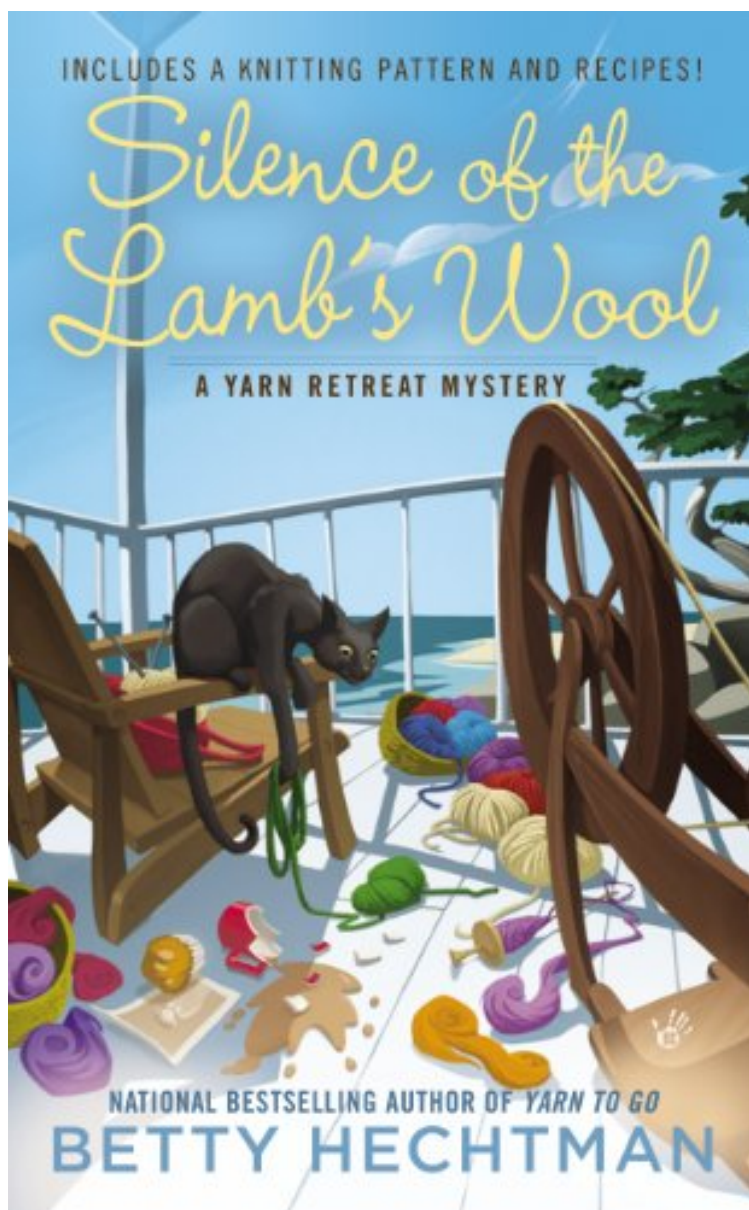


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# Silence of the Lamb's Wool



Par Betty Hechtman  
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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurDessert chef Casey Feldstein has learned one end of a knitting needle from the other after inheriting her aunts yarn retreat business, but a murder threatens to unravel her latest event . . .Caseys running a new retreat called From Sheep to Shawl at a resort on the atmospheric Monterey Peninsula.

Participants will learn about sheepshearing, fixing up the fleece, and spinning, and will eventually knit a lovely shawl.Nicole Welton has been hired to teach the fleece-to-fiber portion of the retreat. Shes an expert spinner, and her small shop in Cadbury by the Sea houses a beautiful assortment of spinning wheels and drop spindles. But when the new teacher fails to show up for class and is found lying dead on the boardwalk,

it leaves everyone's nerves frayed. Now Casey has to knit together clues faster than she can count stitches before someone else at the retreat gets dropped . . . Includes a knitting pattern and a recipe!

**Extrait Acknowledgments**

There is nothing like being awakened by a ringing phone and finding a pair of yellow eyes staring back at you. I think Julius knew I'd never had a pet and he'd taken it on as his duty to train me in the art of cat cohabitation, which included sitting on my chest when he wanted breakfast. His yellow eyes blinked at me as if to say, Would you get up and get me some food. Preferably that stuff in the can with the fabulous fishy odor. The fluffy black cat let out a complaining meow as I tried to move him out of the way so I could reach for the cordless, which continued to ring insistently. He held on tight and jumped off only at the last minute with another meow as I clicked on the phone. What was that noise? my mother said, skipping right past a hello or good morning. It sounded like a cat. Casey, don't tell me you got a cat. Not with your history. This was exactly why I hadn't told her about Julius. Besides, I didn't really get Julius. He showed up at my door, invited himself in and stayed. I could only guess at his backstory. I'd taken him to the vet, who gave him his shots and told me he was somewhere between one and five years old. Since he'd already been neutered, it appeared he had belonged to somebody and then was most likely abandoned. Along with the other cat supplies, I'd gotten him a collar with his name on it and had him chipped. The history my mother was referring to was the fact that I had trouble sticking with things. How could I explain to her that the cat was different? I might have trouble sticking with professions, but Julius and I were going to be together for his forever, no matter what. But I didn't have to worry about an explanation, because she didn't leave space for one. She just launched into her call. I didn't wake you, did I? my mother said, before offering some excuse about the time difference. C'mon. My mother is a cardiologist who fixes broken hearts. Did she really expect me to believe she couldn't calculate that 9:00 a.m. in Chicago translated to 7:00 a.m. here in Cadbury by the Sea, California? Nor did I believe that she didn't remember that I worked nights baking desserts for the Blue Door restaurant and muffins for the coffee spots in town. I sat up, reluctantly pulling back the snugly lightweight down comforter I'd been cocooned in as my mother continued on with small talk. She always began our calls that way, as if I didn't know what was coming. My feet touched the cold wood floor and felt their way into the rose-colored plush slippers next to the bed. The light coming in the room was flat and I could see a snippet of the white sky. It didn't matter that it was May; the weather was the same as it had been in November. Cool, cloudy and damp. Once I was well versed in what was going on with my pediatrician father, she moved on to the real point of the call. If my mother hadn't been a doctor, she could have been an interrogator for the cops. So, have you had enough yet? Are you ready to leave? she said. I bristled silently at her questions. But I couldn't argue. I had a certain reputation and I can't say it wasn't well earned. I'd gone through numerous professions: a semester of law school before dropping out, two years of substitute teaching at a private school before I faced the truth that it wasn't for me. Even my gig as a baker had lasted only six months, until the bistro closed. But at least I'd loved it, and in a way it had led me to a future. The rest of the time I'd done temp work: everything from handing out samples of breath mints to spritzing shoppers with perfume. The only temp job I'd really liked was working at the detective agency, but that had ended, too. Hoping a fresh start would make a difference, I'd relocated to my aunt's converted garage/guesthouse in Cadbury by the Sea. With her help, I'd gotten a job baking desserts at the Blue Door along with the muffin-baking business. Thinking about my aunt Joan made my eyes get misty. Just a few months after I'd moved in, she was killed in a hit-and-run. I'd inherited her house and her business. Mother, it's different this time, I said. I could practically see her response. She was no doubt dressed in one of her many pantsuits and I'd heard one of her dangle earrings knock against the phone. I would bet her eyes had gone skyward as she'd shaken her head in disbelief. I might have shared a little of her disbelief. It wasn't as if I had any experience in the business my aunt had left me. It was called Yarn2Go and involved putting on yarn retreats. The next question was always, What are yarn retreats? The retreat part is easy to understand. It means a group of people withdrawing for prayer, meditation, study or instruction under a director. I guess the director means me. There isn't any prayer or study involved, but since yarn work seems to be meditative, you could keep the meditation in. And there is some kind of instruction. That's where the yarn part comes in. So far it has been only knitting. Another reason for my mother's disbelief was my basic lack of yarn skills, or so she thought. When I put on the first retreat I hadn't even known how to knit. I have to admit it wasn't exactly love at first clack of the needles, but something happened during the weekend and by the end I'd begun to understand why people loved working with yarn. You could say I'd caught the bug. In the time since that retreat, I had upped my skills, though I still had a long way to go before I'd be close to my aunt's level. At least now I knew how to cast on, knit, purl and cast off. I hadn't discussed it with my mother, knowing there

was no way she would understand. I girded myself as I got ready to tell her about the retreat I had coming up the following weekend. I'm doing an event Aunt Joan always wanted to do. It's a little bigger than the first one I put on with only five retreaters. Well, six if you count the one who died. If I were you, I'd never mention that anyone died again. Who would want to go on a retreat if they knew last time that someone didn't make it to the end? So, what's the big number of retreaters for this one? Seven? It was as close as my mother came to a joke. More like twenty, I said. Twenty? she repeated. This retreat is totally different from the last. Joan called it Sheep to Shawl. We're going to start off with some sheep getting sheared humanely of course then go through the steps of turning the wool into yarn. Finally everyone will knit a shawllette out of the finished yarn. Before my mother could say anything, I added that I'd found somebody in town who knew about the process of turning wool into yarn and was handling that particular aspect. My mother didn't really want to hear all the details and cut in. I'm just checking. The cooking school called to let me know that a new session is starting up next month. It's all set up for you. You could be spending the summer in Paris. And at the end, you'd be a professional chef. I'd gotten the same call the previous month. When I'd first taken over my aunt's business, my parents well, mostly my mother had stepped in, sure that I was just going off on another temporary job tangent, and offered to send me to cooking school in France, which she regarded as a way to turn my interest in baking into a real profession. I gave her the same answer I'd given her the month before: Not yet. I wanted to say not ever, but one thing I'd learned about myself was never say never. After a few well-placed sighs of disapproval, my mother asked about Sammy. Sammy was Dr. Samuel Glickner, a urologist and my former boyfriend. He would have had the title of husband if my mother had had her way. Although we'd broken up, we were still friends, and he'd recently relocated from Chicago to the Monterey Peninsula and joined a urology practice. He insisted he wasn't following me. He claimed to love the area and it was a chance to pursue his love of magic. He got a job doing card tricks at a bar, I said. My mother gasped and I had to fight the urge to laugh. And I hadn't even mentioned that it was kind of a tough biker bar in Seaside. Has he lost his mind? she said finally. What if his patients see him? If only Sammy could have heard my mother, he would have been so happy. He was convinced that part of the reason things hadn't worked out with us was that my mother liked him too much. Well, not anymore. And the cop down the street, what's his name? my mother said. Dane Mangano. What about him? I answered, playing dumb. Casey, I have eyes. Your father and I were only there for a short time, but I saw there was something between you. She was right about that. There was some kind of spark that flitted between us, but I was letting it fizzle out. He was a neighbor and this was a small town. I knew me. If things didn't last and most likely they wouldn't, I'd still have to live down the street from him. I wondered if I should mention the food thing we'd worked out. Dane Mangano was a cop who cooked pots of pasta covered with mouthwatering homemade sauce. I made desserts, but when it came to regular meals, I was okay living on frozen entrees. Dane and I had worked out an exchange. He left me plates of the delicious pasta and I left him muffins and desserts. I heard some noise on my mother's end and guessed her next patient was there. Just before she signed off, she said her trademark comment: I don't get it, Casey. When I was your age, I was a wife, a mother and a doctor, and you're a... what? My reaction was automatic, too. No thinking, just my back going up while I searched for a snappy retort. But before I could say a word, her tone softened and she added, It's only because I love you. Have a good day, sweetie. Then with a click she was gone and I was left with a lump in my throat only she could put there. By now I'd made it into the room I used as an office. What that meant was that I had left it the way my aunt had it arranged. Even to the point of keeping my knitting stuff in there. The knitted scarf I'd started during the first retreat hung from a doorknob where I could admire it. I was so proud of the fact that I had finished it completely, down to adding the fringe. Because of my worry about finishing things, my projects after the scarf had all been items I could make in a short amount of time. I'd become a wiz at washcloths, small pouch purses and bandanna scarves. The golden crocheted lion my aunt had made was still guarding the desk. And I'd left the seafoam green lap blanket hanging on the arm of the black leather love seat. I liked to think they were reminders of her and what I might make in the future. I'd gone into the office to check the status of the tote bags for the early birds, as I called them. Three of the people who'd come on my first retreat were coming ahead of time for a pre-retreat retreat and would be arriving this morning. The three tomato-red bags still needed the drop spindles and the pattern for the shawllette. Julius came in and popped up on the love seat, trying to get my attention. As soon as I looked at him, he jumped down and sauntered toward the open door, looking behind to see if I was following. I got the message and he led the way to the kitchen. He went directly to the refrigerator in case there was any doubt of what he wanted. When this can is gone, that's it, I said, opening the refrigerator door. I'd wrapped the half-used can in multiple layers of plastic to contain the

smell. I held my nose while I went through the layers, having gotten a whiff of mackerel when I first opened the can. A stink to me; heaven to him. I realized I must love this cat. I fed him before I even thought about making coffee. He ate every morsel of his stink fish while I stirred some crystals in hot water. I looked at my aunts coffeepot and thought I really ought to start using it, but this instant stuff was so much easier. I sat down at the table with the coffee and a container of yogurt while Julius searched the bowl for any pieces he might have missed. When he was done, he nestled in my lap and began to purr his thank-yous. It was nice having all this space after living in the converted garage, which was really just one big room. I knew my aunt would be happy to see how I was changing things around to make the house my own. The kitchen had been the first order of business and I liked seeing my stand mixer ready for action on the sea greentiled counter. All my baking pans were easily accessible and my cooking tools nicely arranged in the drawers. Julius took time out from his purring to tap me on the arm for his taste of the yogurt. I gave him the last spoonful and then we both got up. I had places to go and people to see.

Here on the tip of the Monterey Peninsula, the weather was the same year-round. The temperature bounced back and forth between the fifties and sixties, occasionally slipping up into the seventies, and I learned a whole vocabulary for describing white skies and fog because blue skies came and went in a hurry. I found the perfect outerwear was fleece and I now had a whole wardrobe of the soft nubby jackets in different colors. This morning I opted for the cream-colored one with a rosy pink scarf wound around my neck to add a little color. I zipped up the fleece as I stepped outside, letting the bracing air wipe away the last feeling of sleepiness. When I had bought Julius his cat supplies at Cadbury Pets, the pet specialist suggested I make him an indoor cat. Right. He was an escape artist able to turn door handles and slip through windows left open only a sliver. The solution was to let him go in or out at his own discretion. He followed me down the step from the back door and took off into what passed for a backyard. I was relieved when he didn't follow me farther. He wasn't a welcome guest where I was going. I lived on the edge of Cadbury by the Sea. Everything was wilder out here and peoples yards had either whatever native plants (that's the politically correct way of saying weeds) that grew on their own or ivy ground cover. The only planted aspects at my place were the pots of red and white impatiens my aunt had set near the back door. I'd never been an outdoor kind of person. Growing up in the hermetically sealed Hancock building in downtown Chicago had been all about looking at the view rather than being part of it. There, Lake Michigan was a few blocks away. Here, an even shorter distance took me to the sea. I could smell the salt in the air and hear the rhythm of the waves as I crossed the street to Vista Del Mar, the hotel and conference center where the retreats were held. It was obvious why my aunt had decided to hold the retreats here. How much more convenient could you get than just across the street? And there was another reason, too. Something about the way Vista Del Mar was closer to a camp than a resort made it the perfect setting for yarn lovers to gather and work on their craft. Two stone pillars marked the entrance to the driveway. The flat light made the dark weathered buildings appear even more moody, like they were hiding deep secrets. The buildings were spread over more than a hundred rolling acres surrounded by picturesque trees, and the hotel and conference center grounds were even more untamed than the rest of the area. There was no team of gardeners taking care of these grounds. The Monterey pines and Monterey cypress trees grew of their own accord, and if one of the lanky Monterey pines toppled over, it was left where it fell to return to the earth on its own. Recently, I'd heard it wasn't just trees that were left to decompose on their own. When an animal died amidst the tall golden grass and brush, it was left where it fell as well. That thought kept me from looking too closely at the grounds as I proceeded down the driveway and followed the road as it curved toward the main building, called the Lodge. I had done my best to sound confident about the upcoming retreat to my mother, but the truth was I was nervous. This was the first retreat I was doing from scratch and it was much more ambitious than just getting a few people together to knit. I was relieved that it was only Monday morning and the main group wasn't arriving until Thursday. I was looking forward to seeing the three arriving today. The early birds had become friends. They were the real reason for my first stop at the Lodge. I wanted to make sure their rooms were together and that there was a common area for them to meet and spend time with their needles. The Lodge was a combination lobby, social hall and business area. To me it seemed like the heart of Vista Del Mar. I opened the double doors and walked into the cavernous room. This early on a Monday morning was probably the quietest time of the week. All the weekenders had checked out the day before and the people arriving for the coming week hadn't checked in yet. So, it was no surprise the seating area was empty. It was funny to think that the gathering spot around the massive stone fireplace had recently been refurbished. Refurbishing usually meant something had been updated and looked new and modern. Not here. In the case of Vista Del Mar, it meant new things that looked

old and were in keeping with the Arts and Crafts design of the building. The leather couches and mission-style chairs were pretty much copies of what had been there before. Even though it was daylight, the table lamps were on, adding a warm glow from their amber-colored glass shades. The table tennis and pool table both sat empty at the far end of the room. The door was open to the gift shop, but I was betting there weren't any customers. The rest of the room was equally deserted. The chairs were all pushed in on the two long wood tables near the piano. As I finished surveying the room, I glanced out the big windows and caught sight of the wooden deck and beyond the sand dunes that ran the whole length of the property. A deer was just crossing the boardwalk that led through the sand. After years of abuse, the white hills had been replanted and were now covered with native plants and tall bushes. The walkway looked like it was made out of old railroad ties, but in reality I think it was something like recycled plastic soda bottles. Even with no customers, there was somebody manning the registration counter. It was really a big wooden barrier that separated the social aspects of the room from the business side. As I got ready to take care of my business, my nose perked up at the scent of freshly brewed coffee coming from the newly added caf. It was definitely going to be my next stop. I think the woman behind the registration counter was glad for the company and it was lucky I had come in to double check. They had it all wrong for my early birds and had put them in rooms in different buildings. It always made me feel good when I found a problem like that and took care of it. I suppose it was silly, but it made me feel competent. Ms. Feldstein, we were just talking about you. The voice came from behind me and startled me. I hadn't realized anyone else was there. When I turned I was looking almost directly into Kevin St. John's moon-shaped face. He was the manager of Vista Del Mar and as usual dressed too formally for the rustic surroundings. The white shirt, conservative tie and dark suit combined with his serious expression made him look more like an undertaker than the person in charge of a place where people came to have fun. I smiled weakly in response to his comment. I'm not sure if Kevin St. John just didn't like me or if it was all about the retreats. He had made it clear that he wanted to host any retreats held on the property and was unhappy that I had held on to my aunt's business instead of turning everything over to him.

When I looked beyond him I saw that they included Cora and Madeleine Delacorte and a man who seemed to be with them. The Delacorte sisters were the last of the Delacorte family. Their family had owned fleets of fishing boats, a cannery and lots of property in Cadbury. The fishing fleets were long gone and the cannery had been turned into a shopping mall, and most of the property had been sold off and the money invested. The sisters had kept one of the Victorian houses for themselves, and Vista Del Mar. Though Kevin St. John liked to give the impression he was the lord of the hotel and conference center, as the owners, they were really his bosses. The Delacorte sisters were in their seventies and their almost-matching navy blue knit suits seemed a little formal. They both had handbags hanging off their arms, Queen Elizabeth style. The man with them kept looking around the Lodge as if he were taking measurements. Casey, it's so nice to see you, Cora Delacorte said. She was the more vocal of the sisters and seemed to be the one in charge. I guessed they had both had early-morning appointments at the Cadbury Hair Salon. The giveaway was the slightly chemical scent of hair spray and the perfect bubble style each of them sported. No flat sides from sleeping on a pillow. And since the dark reddish brown color and the wiry texture of their hair didn't go together, I suspected the color was beautician enhanced. My old detective boss, Frank, would have been proud of me. During the brief time I'd worked with him, I had honed my powers of observation, even if most of the work I'd done was on the phone. Madeleine was the silent sister. She kept a step back from the inner circle and looked toward the door like she wanted to leave. I was just telling Cora and Madeleine that your retreat was going to be one of the first under our new policy, Kevin St. John said. I felt my stomach churn. Whatever the policy was, I was sure it wasn't going to be good and I doubted that was all he'd said. I was willing to bet there had been some kind of disparaging remark thrown in about how I ran things. I was trying to get along with him, but he made it hard. Vista Del Mar was his domain and running it seemed like more than a job to him.

He was possessive and protective, but most of all he wanted everything his way. Sometimes I thought he viewed the guests as a necessary evil. Kevin St. John nodded solicitously toward Cora and Madeleine. I was about to explain it all for Cora and Madeleine, he said. I'm sure you remember when the cell tower that gave a signal to Vista Del Mar blew over during a storm. It's been replaced, but apparently it was moved to another location, leaving Vista Del Mar in a dead zone. To demonstrate, he took out his phone and pushed it toward me so I could see it had no reception. At first it seemed like a negative, until I thought about it. The whole cell phone thing has gotten out of hand. I would look out into the Lodge and see nothing but people staring at their phones, tablets or computers. It never seemed to go along with the spirit of Vista Del Mar.

So, I decided the best thing to do was simply to go completely unplugged. Completely unplugged? I

repeated. You mean no Wi-Fi? He nodded. It will make Vista Del Mar stand out. People come here to get away from the stresses of their high-intensity world. Now they truly will. As he spoke, I looked around the seating area and noticed the TV was gone, and he confirmed that was part of being unplugged. What about the radios in the rooms? I asked. The rooms had neither TVs nor telephones and the only connection to the outside world were old clock radios. The kind where you didn't need a manual to figure out how to set the alarm. Kevin assured me the radios were staying. I didn't say our guests would be out of touch. He gestured toward a large corkboard next to the gift shop. People can call the desk and we'll take a message and post it. Guests can leave messages for other guests there, too. He swiveled and indicated the alcove next to the large wooden registration counter. I've had landlines installed and were putting them in phone booths. The guests may balk at first, but by the end of their stay, I'm sure they will be thanking us. Imagine not having to listen to one side of endless conversations or watch people walk into trees because they are staring at their smartphone screen. I could see his point, but I also knew that some of my group were going to freak when they heard the news. There's no reason for you to have to fill your pretty head with all these details, the man with Cora and Madeleine said. I noticed that Cora turned toward him with a melting smile and more than a few bats of her eyelashes before she shifted her attention back to me. Where are my manners, Casey. I don't think you've met Burton Fiore, my fiancé. How had I missed that news? Neither of the sisters had ever been married, so one of them getting engaged was big news. You're getting married? I didn't mean to blurt it out, but it wasn't that often that a seventy-something woman introduced you to her fiancé first-ever fiancé. I heard Kevin St. John snicker at my comment. I'm sure he was hoping it would irritate Cora Delacorte and make her dislike me. Then she would renege on the agreement she'd made with my aunt. Cora had adored my aunt Joan and had been impressed that in her actor days she'd been the spokesperson for Tidy Soft toilet paper. The Delacorte sisters had loved the idea of my aunt putting on yarn retreats at Vista Del Mar and had offered her the rooms and facilities at a reduced rate. The same deal had carried over to me. I wasn't sure if it was really the money part that bothered Kevin St. John as much as having his power stepped over. It was clear that he liked to see himself as the lord of Vista Del Mar. But to Kevin St. John's chagrin, Cora merely smiled at my comment. I know it must seem surprising, but when Cupid's arrow pierces your heart, well, age doesn't seem to matter. She turned and looked toward Burton with adoring eyes as he seemed to reciprocate. It's all so new, she said. Burton just popped the question a few days ago. She held out her hand to show off a sizable diamond on her finger. I regarded the man with new interest and wondered if Cora knew she was a cougar. Burton Fiore appeared a good ten years younger than she was. He had salt-and-pepper hair and a mustache that added a little interest to his round soft face. It was hard to tell if his eyes were shining with love for her or were just beady looking. Maybe it wasn't fair to judge him since we'd just met, but I immediately wondered if Cupid's arrow had been directed by dollar signs. Have you seen our new café? Cora said with pride in her voice. Her pumps made a clicking sound on the floor as she led me to a wall plaque next to the café's open door. The plaque was definitely new. I'd been dropping muffins off at the café since it opened a month ago and had seen the interior a number of times, but I followed along anyway, since she seemed so anxious to show it off. My breakfast had been pretty meager and I glanced at the glass case filled with fruit salad and cold sandwiches with a hungry eye. Jane Crawley, the café employee, was wiping down the counter and looked up at us, inquiring if we wanted anything. I felt like saying I'd take one of everything, but Cora said she was just showing off her namesake. Cora's gaze stopped on the muffins in the glass-domed container on the long wood counter. Are those your work? she asked, directing her comment at me. I nodded and she asked what kind they were. I hesitated. The town council wanted everything in Cadbury to have straightforward names without any cutesy flourishes. They'd hassled me when I started calling my muffins fun names like Merry Berry or Heal the World with Chocolate, so I'd renamed the muffins with more practical names. But in my mind I still sometimes called them the fun ones. Cora was really part of the establishment, so I told her they were chocolate and vanilla muffins, but my name for them was Ebony and Ivory. Jane seemed a little intimidated by Cora but still managed to mention that half the muffins had already sold and it was just a little after nine. In that case, Cora said, why don't you pack a couple of them up for me. Burton and I can have them with our lunch. She patted my hand. Everything you bake is worth every calorie. While Jane packed up the muffins, Cora asked me about the upcoming retreat. I described how it was going to start with a sheep shearing and then the group was going to prepare the wool and spin it into yarn. The grand finale is knitting a shawl with the yarn. Cora nodded with interest though I doubted she knew much about yarn craft. Her expression dimmed a little and she leaned toward me. I hope there won't be any deaths this time. I didn't know what to say. Should I correct her and say that only one of the actual deaths

took place during my last retreat? It probably wouldn't help, so I said the only reassuring thing I could come up with and reminded her that I had found the killer. That's true, she said. As I recall, you were quite the detective. Better than our own Cadbury Police Department. I was relieved when the subject was dropped as Jane handed her the package with the muffins. When we rejoined the group in the main room of the Lodge, she held up the bag and told Burton she had treats. I couldn't help but notice that Burton Fiore and Kevin St. John had struck an adversarial pose. Madeleine had found a chair. I tried to remember if I had ever heard her talk, wondering if she might not be able to speak. As if to answer my thought, Madeleine asked her sister what was taking so long. Everything seems fine to me, Madeleine said with a wave of her hand, apparently to indicate all of Vista Del Mar. How many acres did you say this place is? Burton directed his question to Kevin St. John. The manager muttered an answer under protest and turned his attention back to Cora. It didn't stop Burton Fiore's stream of questions. When he asked if Vista Del Mar offered twenty-four-hour room service, Kevin sputtered and I stifled a laugh. Room service? The manager mentioned the caf, making sure he said the whole name. We offer a full line of drinks, snacks and coffee drinks. It's up to the guests to plan ahead if they're going to be hungry after hours. Undaunted, Cora's husband-to-be walked over to an open area in front of the large window looking out on the wood deck. Cora, this is the spot I was telling you about. It would be a perfect place to put in a bar. Kevin St. John immediately dismissed the idea, saying it didn't go along with the vibe of the place. We have beer and wine in the Cora and Madeleine Delacorte Caf.

This isn't a cocktail or whiskey shots sort of place. Kevin's usually placid face had taken on an annoyed expression. This is a historic place, one of a kind. If guests are checking the thread count on the sheets and how plushy the towels are, this isn't the place for them. There are plenty of resorts in Pebble Beach if they want luxury. People come here for the experience. I waited for Cora to say something in favor of one of the men, but she merely smiled. Madeleine made a harrumph sound and wanted to know if the meeting was over yet. Cora's navy blue Chanel-style jacket had gotten askew and Burton straightened it and gave her shoulder an affectionate touch. The older Delacorte sister leaned into his gesture and thanked him with a few bats of her eyelashes, saying how nice it was having someone to watch her back. Kevin St. John viewed the moment with distaste, probably figuring it was only going to get worse once they were married. The door opened from the deck side and a distinguished-looking man with silver hair came in with a quick stride. He was wearing cargo pants and a bomber-style leather jacket. I wondered if his face was naturally ruddy or if it was the cold air. He looked over the group with a friendly smile. Virgil Scarantino at your service. He did a mock bow and I instantly liked him. Kevin took it upon himself to introduce us, though the only ones Virgil hadn't met before were Cora's fianc and me. He seemed as surprised as I'd been at Cora's engagement news, but handled it better and just offered them his congratulations before he turned to me. So you're Casey Feldstein, he said with a big smile. I wondered who was behind all the muffins and the wonderful desserts at the Blue Door. He went into detail about his favorites, which turned out to be the muffins he called those rich chocolate ones. My name for them was Heal the World with Chocolate. As for the Blue Door desserts, it was apple pie all the way as far as he was concerned. When he finished, I was almost blushing from all the praise. Well, chief, he said to Kevin St. John, should I tell them my duties? The manager nodded and gave Virgil the floor. I've lived in Cadbury all my life and love this area. Nothing gives me more pleasure than to share what I know so I've volunteered to do some nature walks and star hikes. Cora loved the idea and thought it was very much in the spirit of the place. Madeleine surprised us all by adding her approval. I hadn't meant to get sucked into this dog and pony show for the Delacorte sisters and started to excuse myself until I saw that someone else had come in. Dr. Sammy? In a tuxedo, no less. Sammy Glickner, my former boyfriend, was tall with a hulky teddy bearlike build. In the tuxedo, he reminded me of a panda bear. He was all smiles as he crossed the space to the group in a few long strides. His eyes were glued to the manager, but then he saw me, his eyes widened as his face lit up. I knew we weren't a couple and it was all my doing but it was certainly nice to have someone seem so glad to see me. Case, what do you think? His hands rolled down displaying his outfit, the way models on game shows displayed prizes. I still laughed at his calling me Case.

Really? Did taking one letter off my name make it a nickname? Kevin St. John broke into the moment. I thought it would be entertaining having table magic on the weekends in the dining hall. The sisters both nodded their agreement. Virgil thought it sounded dandy, and Burton Fiore just muttered Dining hall? before excusing himself from the group, saying he had to make a call. The manager introduced Dr. Sammy to the group as the Amazing Dr. Sammy. I got the message that Kevin St. John was running all this by the Delacorte sisters for their approval rather than presenting it as a fait accompli. Sammy was there to audition for them. I felt instantly nervous for him and almost couldn't watch, but Sammy started his patter without the

slightest stumble and took out a deck of cards. He had sized up the situation and played to Cora, who was delighted with his little show. She even clapped at the end. Madeleine seemed to have forgotten her rush to leave and added her own applause. The guests will love you, Cora said, beaming a smile at Sammy.

Madeleine nodded her agreement and Kevin St. John told Sammy the job was his, provided the first weekend went well. The only person not so sure about adding Sammy as a regular on the weekends was me. The retreats I put on were always on the weekend, which meant our lives would be intersecting when I was doing my best to keep some distance between us. So when the Amazing Dr. Sammy offered to do an encore to his audition, I extricated myself from the group. Cora and Madeleine were front and center and I heard them talking as I walked away. Cora spoke directly to Kevin St. John, saying, You're doing such a wonderful job with Vista Del Mar. I like all these changes. Edmund would so approve, she added with a bright sound in her voice. Edmund? Hey, Casey, long time, no see, Alison said as I sailed into the gift shop. I used to see her almost daily when the shop had a coffee wagon, where my muffins had been offered along with the coffee drinks and assorted other snacks. But once the caf opened, the gift store had been rearranged and a display of T-shirts and fleece jackets with the Vista Del Mar insignia had taken over the spot where the coffee wagon used to sit. Two sides of the shop were almost all windows, which gave a good view of the grounds. As I greeted Alison, I looked through the window behind her and noticed Burton Fiore rejoining Cora and Madeleine. It was interesting watching him without hearing what he was saying. His gestures seemed a little over the top as he greeted the sisters. I'm here about the yarn, I said, turning my attention back inside. When I'd first made the arrangements for the retreat, I'd talked to Alison about carrying yarn and supplies for the retreaters, but also for the other guests of Vista Del Mar. It turned out that when other guests saw the retreat group working with yarn, it inspired them to do the same. All taken care of. Alison came from behind the counter and walked me over to an empty gondola that already had a sign that read YARN. There were empty baskets just waiting to be filled with colorful fibers, and containers for needles and hooks. Someone from Cadbury Yarn is supposed to come by today. I was a little disappointed, because I'd been hoping the yarn would already be there. But my early birds weren't arriving until the afternoon anyway. I'm stopping by Cadbury Yarn. I'll double check with them. Two men wearing matching red polo shirts came into the small store and began to look around. A moment later a woman in sandals and a pale green stretchy outfit walked in. I left Alison to her customers and was startled by the change in the main room of the Lodge when I exited the store. There were more people in the red polo shirts milling around near the registration counter. There seemed to be a lot of others who resembled the woman in stretchy clothes as well. Kevin St. John was in the midst of it all and I figured out these must be two retreat groups he'd made the arrangements for. I played my own game of let's figure out what kind of retreat were they here for as I got closer. The yoga mats were a giveaway for the people in stretchy clothes. There were a lot more of the red polo shirt crowd and they were a little harder to figure out. But after hearing a few bits of conversation, I got that they were from all over the country and were here for a managers retreat. I wondered if the business group had heard that their cell phones were useless and it was nix on the Wi-Fi. The morning was slipping away and I still had things to do before I got back here to greet my pre-retreaters. As I neared the caf, the pungent smell of freshly ground coffee reminded me that I'd planned to stop there. I'd just get the coffee to go. There was a hum of voices as I walked into the corner room and I noticed that Jane was talking to someone standing at the counter. The room was almost the mirror image of the gift shop, with the same two walls of windows, making it feel like it was almost outside. I noted the sky had turned a brighter shade of white. As I got closer I heard something about a problem just before the man standing by the counter turned toward me. When I saw that it was Will Welton I completely understood. He was the caretaker of Vista Del Mar and problems were his business. In fact if there were no problems, he wouldn't have a job. Morning, Casey, he said in a friendly voice. He was one of those people who seemed to always be upbeat. He even walked with a spring in his step. His longish blond hair was a little scruffy, but it made him look cute. He stepped aside so I could get right up to the counter, probably because the need for coffee showed in my eyes. Jane must have noticed it, too, because she was already reaching for one of the large white paper cups. So, you're back. What will it be? Cappuccino, latte or maybe just a straight cup of today's brew? Jane was trying to be sparkly, but it came across as unnatural. It was terrible, but whenever I said her name, it seemed to be preceded by plain in my mind. She had pale brown hair that hung to her shoulders and she never wore makeup. Her clothes were always neat, but like the light blue top she was wearing, they were best described as serviceable. I'd heard that she'd taken care of her ailing mother and probably had never had anyone to show her how to enhance her appearance.

While I waited, Jane told the caretaker about my earlier visit. Will knew all about Vista Del Mar being

unplugged. It was fine with him, as he was into the place being authentic. And it will be a lot safer. I've seen guests walk right off the paved path without realizing it. They have their noses stuck in their screens instead of looking at all this. We all looked out the window and agreed with one another that missing all this beauty was almost a crime. I hope my retreat group takes it well, I said. It was only one of the uncertainties I had about the upcoming weekend. It was a bigger group and an ambitious program. I said something to that effect and Will gave me a reassuring nod. There's nothing for you to worry about. Nicole is an expert and really looking forward to handling the fiber part. He spoke another five minutes about his wife's skills, bringing up that she had a masters degree in textiles and was an accomplished spinner, weaver and knitter. You don't have to sell me. She's the only reason I considered doing this retreat. It's nice that you're so proud of her. I turned to Jane and asked for a cappuccino. Isn't Nicole supposed to give your early people a lesson tomorrow? Jane asked, trying to be part of the conversation. That's absolutely right, I said. Right about this time. I really want to thank you for giving her this opportunity. She's kind of gotten off track. This could be just what she needs, Will said. A deliveryman came in wheeling a dolly full of boxes. He slipped them off the cart and asked Jane to sign for the delivery. While she signed, he looked on the counter at the empty container where my muffins had been. Missed them again, he said with regret. Jane told him the last one had just been sold and introduced me as the baker. He gave me an appreciative nod and said it always felt like his lucky day when he managed to score a muffin. I suggested he might have a better chance at one of his earlier stops, since I provided muffins for a number of places in town. Will do, he said with a smile. One question. What kind are you baking for tomorrow? I blushed at the compliment, but loved it all the same. Then I hesitated. Should I give the real name or the toned-down version the town council required? Out loud I said blueberry, but in my head I called them by my name, The Blues. The empty dolly made a squeaky racket as the delivery guy wheeled it out. I better get back to work, Will said, picking up his coffee, but Jane took it from him. You'll spill it all over yourself. She snapped a white cap on the paper cup with the Vista Del Mar logo on it and picked up what looked like a long green cocktail pick. I was surprised when she dropped it into the opening in the cap. It's something new we just got. It acts as a plug so the coffee doesn't splash out of the top. I looked closer and saw it had VDM embossed on the top. What's the problem today? I asked Will. The antique plumbing acting up? Will laughed. It's always acting up. You just have to know how to finesse it to work. It seemed kind of odd. Will was barely twenty-five and yet he had such an affection for Vista Del Mar, most of which was over one hundred years old. He was an expert at replacing shingles and aging the replacements so you couldn't tell the old from the new. He mixed his own formula for polishing the brass doorknobs, dictated to the housekeepers what kind of cleaners they should use that wouldn't harm the old surfaces and he even made his own insecticide from a vintage recipe. It's the phone booths, he said before explaining that he'd found three that had been in the back room of an old pharmacy in Capitola. He'd brought them over in his truck and they needed to be installed so the phones could be put in. I think they're going to be a nice touch from the past. He thanked Jane for putting the plug in his cup and went off to his work.

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