

Double Date Disaster

Garden Girls - The Golden Years

Cozy Mystery Series Book 1

Hope Callaghan

hopecallaghan.com

Copyright © 2020
All rights reserved

This book is a work of fiction. Although places mentioned may be real, the characters, names and incidents, and all other details are products of the author's imagination and are fictitious. Any resemblance to actual organizations, events, or actual persons, living or dead is purely coincidental.

No part of this publication may be copied, reproduced in any format, by any means, electronic or otherwise, without prior consent from the copyright owner and publisher of this book. The only exception are brief quotations in printed reviews.

Visit my website for new releases and special offers: hopecallaghan.com

Thank you to these wonderful ladies who help make my books shine - Peggy H., Cindi G., Jean P., Wanda D., Renate P., Alix C. and Sheila G. for taking the time to preview *Double Date Disaster*, for the extra sets of eyes and for catching all of my mistakes.

A special THANKS to my reader review team:

Alice, Alta, Amary, Amy, Becky, Brenda, Carolyn, Charlene, Christine, Debbie, Denota, Devan, Diann, Grace, Helen, Jo-Ann, Jean M, Judith, Meg, Megan, Linda, Polina, Rebecca, Rita, Theresa, Valerie and Virginia.

CONTENTS

Cast of Characters

Chapter 1

Cast of Characters

Gloria Rutherford-Kennedy. Gloria, a recently remarried retiree, is the ringleader of her merry band of friends. Always one to find a mystery...or they somehow manage to find her. She lives on a farm on the outskirts of Belhaven, a small town in West Michigan.

Lucy Carlson. Gloria's best friend. The wild one of the bunch, Lucy is a bit of a weapon's expert and part-tomboy. She enjoys shooting guns, riding four-wheelers and hunting...when she's not being dragged into one of Gloria's mysteries.

Dorothy Jenkins. Dorothy "Dot" Jenkins and her husband, Ray, are co-owners of Belhaven's home cooking, sit down restaurant. Dot tries to stay on the sidelines during Gloria's adventures, but most of the time, it doesn't work out that way.

Margaret Hansen. Recently widowed, Margaret is learning to adjust to life alone. The most critical of the friends, Margaret tends to see everything in black and white.

Ruth Carpenter. Head postmaster of Belhaven's post office, Ruth is the queen of surveillance and always up on the latest spy equipment. With her recently tricked out/customized, bulletproof van and her high-tech spy gear, Ruth is Gloria's right-hand gal in a lot of the investigations.

Andrea Malone. The youngest of the Garden Girls Gang, Andrea met Gloria and the others through a string of unfortunate events. Despite Gloria being protective of her young friend, Andrea is usually in the thick of all the investigations.

Chapter 1

The trio of friends stood staring at the painting. Gloria Kennedy focused on the woman's angry expression, noting the dark circles under her eyes.

The self-portrait's deep purple backdrop was highlighted by jagged peaks of orange and black, following the same dark theme. "I...it's a one-of-a-kind original," she said diplomatically. "Although I'm not sure it bears a strong resemblance to you."

"That's what art is all about," Margaret ran a light hand along the side of the golden oak frame. "It's my individual interpretation, an exploration of my inner self."

"There are some concerning elements."

"Concerning elements?" Margaret echoed. "Like what?"

Gloria hesitated. "Your eyes. They're hollow and sunken in. Your dilated pupils are charcoal gray. Your skin looks cadaver-ish."

"It's disturbing," Ruth Carpenter said bluntly.

"If painting goth makes you happy and it's not leading you into a dark place, then I support you one hundred percent." Gloria did a slow turn. "Besides, this place needs more décor."

Margaret, who had recently taken up residence in her newly constructed home in Belhaven Corners, had been slowly unpacking after moving out of her lakefront home. "I'm working on it. It's going to take a while for it to feel like home. Everything is different. It almost feels like I'm living in someone else's house."

It had been an emotional roller coaster ride for the woman whose husband, a former banker, had lost their life's savings in a get-rich-quick-scheme that had soured. Instead of working through his disastrous decisions, Don had taken his own life leaving his wife heartbroken and bitter.

Gloria had done her best to support Margaret through the emotional upheaval that followed. Some months back, she had confessed her home and everything in it reminded her of him.

With some encouragement from her close-knit group of friends, Margaret had purchased the new home. As luck would have it, Gloria's sister, Liz, who had recently moved back from Florida, needed a place to hang her hat.

She promptly paid Margaret six month's rent in advance and arrived with two semi-trailers full of belongings, forcing Margaret to vacate her former home even sooner than she originally planned.

Gloria consulted her watch. “We need to get going. Liz is waiting to share the big surprise she and Eleanor have been working on for you.”

Margaret grabbed her keys off the hook near the door. “You know how much I hate surprises.”

“I’m thinking it’s a *good* surprise. Liz seems very excited about it.” Gloria attempted to sound optimistic despite her own misgivings about what her sister and Belhaven local, Eleanor, were cooking up for Margaret.

“We’re talking Liz, here,” Ruth said. “I must say, I’m anxious to find out what it is, too. Eleanor was in the post office yesterday, nearly bursting at the seams, trying to keep Margaret’s surprise a secret.”

“I’m scared,” Margaret said bluntly.

Gloria propelled her out the front door and to her car while Ruth made a beeline for her van, which was parked near the curb. “I’ll meet you over there.”

“Hold up.” Gloria slowed when she caught sight of Ruth’s van, aka her tricked out spymobile. “There’s something different about the spymobile.”

“Yep.” Ruth grinned.

Margaret joined her, pointing at the cone-shaped megaphone mounted above the sliding side door. “You added a new gadget. It looks like something you would put on an ice cream truck.”

Ruth frowned. “Seriously? It does not.”

“I think it’s the angle.” Gloria stepped closer. “It reminds me of the satellite equipment you see on the sides of those news vans.”

“Hey, maybe after you retire from the post office, you can add a concession window and turn your spymobile into an ice cream van,” Margaret joked. “You can call it Ruth’s Ready-to-Eat Treats.”

Ruth’s eyes widened in horror. “Are you crazy? Cutting a hole in the side would void the warranty on my bullet proof coating.”

“It was a joke.” Margaret rolled her eyes. “I was kidding.”

Ruth marched to the driver’s side door. She gave Margaret a dark look before climbing behind the wheel.

“I don’t think she liked the idea,” Gloria commented. “Just the thought of it is probably going to give her nightmares.”

“She has no sense of humor lately.”

Ruth revved up the engine and peeled out, leaving a set of black skid marks and the overpowering aroma of burning rubber behind.

“I don’t know what it is about that van.” Gloria watched her squeal around the corner and the van disappeared from sight.

“She needs to work on detaching herself emotionally from possessions. It’s not healthy.” Margaret returned to her car and opened the door. “I’ll see you at Liz’s place.”

It was a short drive from Belhaven Corners, the new housing community on the outskirts of town, to Margaret’s former home overlooking Lake Terrace.

Gloria and her husband, Paul, had helped Margaret move out and Liz settle in. She hadn’t been back since moving day. Every time she had dropped by to see her sister, she wasn’t home, which wasn’t necessarily a surprise.

Liz wasn’t much of a homebody, and to be honest, Gloria was skeptical when she announced she was moving to the small town of Belhaven, which was miles away from Grand Rapids, the nearest big city.

Ruth’s van was empty when Gloria pulled in behind it. Lucy Carlson, another one of Gloria’s friends, was also already there.

She waited for Margaret to join her before making their way inside. Liz met them at the top of the stairs. “Dot is on her way.”

Gloria peered past her and into the kitchen. “Where’s Eleanor?”

“She’s running a little late because of her Pilate’s class.”

There was a commotion behind them, and a harried Dot appeared. “Sorry I’m late. Did I miss anything?”

“Nope.” Liz herded them into the kitchen. “You’re right on time.”

“You have the place looking good, Liz. It doesn’t even look like my kitchen anymore.” Margaret tilted her head as she studied the walls. “What happened to the avocado and green grape wallpaper?”

“I took it down. You told me it was okay to make some minor decorating changes, so I decided to start with the kitchen.”

“I like the color. It brightened up the room,” Margaret said.

Gloria wrinkled her nose. “It’s lime green.”

“It’s the color of money,” Liz said. “Green is good luck.”

“You could certainly use that,” Gloria teased.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Liz demanded.

“Ladies.” Dot, the unofficial peacemaker of the bunch, stepped between the sisters. “Let’s not start a war of words over the unusual paint color.”

“I happen to think it complements the kitchen,” Liz said.

“It’s fine, Liz,” Lucy said. “I think it makes the kitchen look larger.”

Dot tapped the top of her watch. “I can’t stay long. What’s this big surprise you have for Margaret that you’ve been hinting about for the past week?”

“The surprise.” Liz clapped her hands. “Margaret, you have to promise me you’ll keep an open mind.”

“Now I am scared,” Margaret muttered.

Liz grasped Margaret’s hand and led her to the kitchen table. On top was a laptop. “I hope I haven’t overstepped my boundaries. I’m sure I speak for everyone here when I say you’ve been a little...”

“Gloomy,” Ruth suggested.

“Yes, gloomy, these past few weeks since your move.”

“Who can blame me? My life has been turned upside down. I moved out of the home Don and I lived in for decades. The Hip Chick Flips reno company Lucy and I started is struggling. I’m turning seventy at the end of this month so, yeah, maybe I’m a little depressed.”

Liz pulled out a chair and waited for Margaret to have a seat. “Which is why Eleanor and I believe we found the perfect solution.” After she was seated, she lifted the lid on the laptop.

A bright blue screen popped up, and at the top was a big, bold headline.

Margaret’s jaw dropped. “No way.”

End of Sneak Peek.

Double Date Disaster Garden Girls: The Golden Years Book 1 coming soon!

[Click here for the Complete Garden Girls Series](#)