

CASSEROLE PARADE

CHAPTER 1

Lisa Henderson's daily routine was to sit on her enclosed lanai, drink a cup of herbal tea and read the morning newspaper. She glanced through different sections of the newspaper, and her eyes were drawn to the obituaries. Was it instinct or curiosity?

Recently, she had moved to The Villages. It's a retirement community located in central Florida. Since her move, she had met only a few of her neighbors. The likely hood of her recognizing someone's name would be a surprise.

Regardless of why she read the obituary was still a mystery. None-the-less, she was pulling into the Little Baptist Church parking lot to attend a funeral service. Timidly, she entered the church.

It was almost full to capacity. Lisa's eyes darted to the left and to the right, trying to locate an empty seat.

Lisa climbed over people's feet, making her way to a seat. "Excuse me. I'm sorry. Please excuse me."

Once she sat down, she drew in a deep breath and exhaled through her nose. She tilted her head slightly to the left and to the right, she didn't see one familiar face.

Lisa was uneasy thinking about how she would answer the question, of how she knew Denise Tillman. With a tissue, she dabbed at the tiny beads of perspiration that had formed above her upper lip.

To calm her nerves, she turned her attention to the program she received when entering the church. She read with interest. Denise Tillman was born and educated in Virginia. She had been married for thirty years to Joseph Tillman. No children, but five nieces and three nephews were listed.

While Lisa continued to read, her ears perked up and began eavesdropping on the conversation the woman sitting next to her was having about Denise Tillman. Carefully, Lisa dropped the program she was holding. Slowly, she picked it up and eased her body closer to the woman.

"I have to say I was shocked. The news about Denise's death shook every core of my body. I just talked to her. Did you know she had cancer?"

The other woman answered, "No. I hadn't heard."

"Well, when I talked to Denise, she said the doctor was optimistic about treating the cancer. In fact...." The woman halted her words in a mid-sentence. She rolled her eyes at Lisa.

Quickly, Lisa lowered her eyes. She opened her purse and began rifling through it, pretending to look for something.

The woman twisted her body and tried to move, but was unsuccessful with Lisa sitting so close to her. The woman could turn her back slightly away from Lisa but not before she gave Lisa a fierce, disgusted look. She leaned into the other woman and whispered.

"Well, at least she's no longer suffering."

The other woman nodded her head and whispered. "You're right but poor Joe. You know he doesn't cook. I'm not sure what he's going to do about meals."

"Pleaseeee." The woman responded and threw up her hands in disgust. "There are what?"

She shrugged. "There are at least 20 or so restaurants and country clubs serving food in The Villages. He can eat out every day of the week, breakfast, lunch, and dinner."

"Come on, no one wants to eat out every day. That gets old."

"Really! Is that why you eat out almost every meal?"

Both women covered their mouths with their hands to conceal their laughter. Unison, they cleared their throat.

The woman closer to Lisa said, "The service is about to begin."

Lisa turned her attention to the man speaking. Listening to the man's dismal demeanor, she prayed the service would become more upbeat. To tune out the lackluster voice, Lisa's mind began to wander.