

SAMPLE CHAPTER – TERROR IN A TEAPOT – A SILVER SISTERS MYSTERY



Chapter 1

Goldie Silver slammed down the phone. *Can't trust anyone these days. Late again. I've had it!* She stomped over to the stairs at the back of the Silver Spoon Antique Shoppe and yelled, "Rudy, get down here."

A balding beanpole in his mid-sixties flew through the open door and ran down the stairs. He tripped over an inert ball of black fur at the bottom and caught hold of the stair rail for support. The fat cat stretched, blinked and slinked toward his favorite perch in the front window. Rudy Valentino turned his back on the finicky feline.

With his shirt sleeves rolled up, orange fluorescent bowtie askew and purple suspenders, Goldie's assistant was an odd looking duck.

"What's up, boss? Need something fixed?" He looked at her expectantly.

She squinted to see the notes on her pad. "Yeah! See if you can fix my problem with the D-C-C-R-M-F-R-R!"

Rudy looked heavenward. "The what?"

"The Russian customs department. All their agencies have names a mile long so I'm just giving you the initials, the English ones anyway. Better yet, maybe you could just call that darn Pistov Forwarders and see if you can get them to track our shipment of Russian antiques. I swear, Juneau has to be the hardest place in the world to get freight delivered. I'll never get those samovars here in time for the church ladies."

"Don't get your britches in a bunch, Goldie, it ain't so bad. There's plenty of places worse'n this."

"Like the moon?"

"Nope, Smarty Pants, right here in Alaska. Hey, take Sitka, for instance. That church waited a whole year for a stained glass window from some fancy Eyetalian glassmakers. They sent it to Stuttgart instead of Sitka. When it finally arrived, they opened the crate and it was a Jewish Star o' David. They went ahead and put the darned thing up anyway, didn't they? What the heck? It's a window, ain't it?"

A little smile played on Goldie's lips. "That's not a very comforting story, Rudy."

"Well, yeah, but it's a big point of interest now. Gives the tourists something to talk about. So see, things work out."

She reached for a dusty pleated skirt in McGregor tartan and waved it in his face. "Okay, so, if the church in Sitka doesn't mind having a Jewish star in their window, maybe the Sisterhood of St. Nicholas would be willing to give Father Innocent a nice Scottish kilt instead of an antique Russian tea urn."

"Calm down boss. Our boys in Vladivostok probably just sent the order out a little late."

Goldie Silver plopped down in her chair trying to control her anger. Rudy was right, it could be worse. So far the shipment of samovars was only two weeks late. The door banged open and two plump women in cheerfully flowered dresses marched purposefully to the back of the shop.

Nora, the taller one, smiled. "Okay, Goldie. Let's see what you've got to choose from. Father Innocent will be so surprised when he opens his retirement gift and sees a genuine Russian samovar. We've even collected a little extra money from everyone."

The shorter lady broke in, "You know, in case one of them is really special, but it's more expensive." She grinned, exposing a chipped front tooth.

Goldie winced. Every morning for the last two weeks, the tenacious Russian Orthodox women appeared as soon as she opened. The dear old priest would be leaving them soon, and she understood their excitement at the prospect of giving their beloved Father Innocent such a wonderful gift. His replacement, Father Augustine, had already arrived. Time *was* running out.

"I'm sorry ladies, the shipment still isn't here. I've got Rudy checking on it right now. I don't..."

The two women glowered at her. Nora loomed angry and menacing. Dora shuffled back and forth as though she had to go to the bathroom.

"You said the shipment would be here two weeks ago and you still have nothing to show us," Nora huffed.

Goldie shot Rudy a desperate glance. "Anything on the samovars, Rudy? These ladies—"

Nora pushed up her sleeves like Popeye getting ready for a fight. "These ladies are going to bust some chops if that shipment doesn't get here before Father Innocent leaves."

Dora was more diplomatic. "We can't wait much longer, you know. That nice young Father Augustine has already come to take his place. Nora thinks he's too young, wet behind the ears, you know," she tried to stifle a giggle, "but I think he's real handsome. Clever, too."

Rudy leaned over the counter and patted Dora's arm. "Now don't you ladies get your blood pressure up, we'll get them samovars in time."

They all turned around as the door flew open again, making the bell jingle furiously. A tornado of a woman with bright red hair, wearing a caftan covered in red and gold swirls, huffed and puffed as she lumbered into the crowded antique shop.

Belle Pepper was three hundred and seventeen pounds of pure drama. She plucked a crumpled hankie from her purse and mopped her damp forehead. "I just came from the Russian church." She gulped, trying to catch her breath as her multi-colored bosom heaved up and down. "He's dead! The priest is dead!"

Nora and Dora chorused, "Father Innocent? Dead?"

Belle shook her head wildly. "Not Father Innocent. Father Augustine! He's been murdered. Right there in the church."

With that, Belle collapsed on one of the antique settees in the middle of the store, and Goldie held her breath, praying it would support her mother-in-law's weight.