

The
**BUTTERFLY
GARDEN**

By Carole Stivers



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Staring out the café window at the sun-drenched street, Hayden Kayne scratched his forehead. Whether intentional or not, William Watson’s paperwork was in sad disarray. Hayden had yet to obtain a comprehensive listing of the property contained in the Watson Estate, something referred to in the Trust as “Exhibit A.” And if he couldn’t locate such, he had no idea how Karyn Johnston could be expected to manage it.

It was strange that someone as parsimonious as William hadn’t kept better track of his assets. But there was more to it than that; Hayden had begun to entertain his own suspicions of foul play. The death of William Watson had certainly been unexpected, but Marian? At their last meeting, in front of the notary on the day before she died, Marian had seemed distracted, nervous. But there’d certainly been no sign that she would drop dead the following morning. Did someone really “have it in” for the Watsons? And if so, why? Perhaps the missing Exhibit A would offer some clue.

He’d decided to try contacting the former successor trustee, the man whose name had been crossed out on the trust documentation signature page and later replaced with Karyn’s—a certain Mr. Gerry Dupuy. At first he’d hit a wall—the man seemed impossible to track down. But then, through William’s old associate Horton Willoughby, he’d learned that Estelle and Horton’s son Tommy had been a friend of Mr. Dupuy’s. After some finagling, Tommy had finally agreed to set up a meeting.

“My son had a falling out with this Mr. Dupuy,” Horton said. “As did William, apparently. Though for many years, so far as I recall, Mr. Dupuy had acted as William’s

advisor in a number of business transactions.”

“And this ‘falling out,’ as you call it...Did it happen in December of 2006? When Gerry Dupuy’s name was removed from the trust?”

“Apparently so,” said Horton, “though my son had nothing to do with Mr. Dupuy by that time.”

“Do you know why Tommy parted ways with this fellow?”

“Mr. Kayne,” Horton said, “if I knew half of what goes on in my sons’ lives...Tommy doesn’t want to talk about it. And Estelle and I have always had a laissez-faire policy when it comes to these things. We invite our children to let us know if they need our help. Aside from that, their lives are their own.”

“I understand,” Hayden said. Thankfully, his own father had been the same way.

The little bell on the café’s door jingled and a young man with light blond hair, a tight black tee shirt and khaki chinos entered. He swiveled on a pair of beige deck shoes, scanning the room with the sort of vigorous energy exuded by people with athletic builds and outsized egos. Hayden kept his head down, hoping that this was not his man.

But it was. The young man strode forward, hand extended.

Hayden half stood to greet him. “Mr. Dupuy?”

“At your service,” the man said, his voice a bit higher-pitched than Hayden had expected based on the strength of his handshake. Gerry Dupuy signaled the waitress for a cup of coffee. Taking a seat, he looked around the room, drumming the table lightly with his fingers.

Hayden cleared his throat, uncertain how to proceed. “I’m sorry,” he said, “but how much do you know about the reason I wanted to see you?”

Mr. Dupuy stopped his drumming long enough for the waitress to deliver his coffee. Adding a generous draught of cream, he stirred vigorously. “Never cared for the coffee here,” he muttered. “Probably why Tommy chose this place for us to meet...” He looked up, and Hayden was astonished by the blue clarity of his eyes. “As to the purpose of our meeting, our mutual friend Tommy Willoughby was not generous with the details. Though I assume this has something to do with the Watsons?”

“And why would you assume that?” Hayden asked, not yet ready to be fully

forthcoming.

“Unless I’m mistaken, I was listed as successor trustee on the Watson Trust. News is they’re both safely stowed, and you’re their legal representative. I suppose you’re here to deliver the goods, such as they are.”

“You believe that you’re still their trustee?” Hayden asked.

“I was, last time I knew.”

“I’m sorry,” Hayden said. “But that’s no longer the case. William had you removed last December.”

Gerry looked up from his coffee, his expression unreadable.

“I would have thought—” Hayden began.

But now the man was smiling broadly, his two rows of even white teeth gleaming in the dim light of the café. “You would have thought he’d told me?” He laughed. “No, he didn’t. I think you’ll find that William Watson was a man of many mysteries.”

“I’m sorry...”

But Gerry was still smiling. “You think it bothers me? Actually, it comes as a relief!”

“A relief?”

Gerry leaned forward, his face just inches from Hayden’s and the dark smell of the coffee already strong on his breath. “That man was in debt up to his eyeballs. I’d be surprised if he had much more than that old house and a measly hundred grand or so, stashed away in some savings account.”

Hayden’s mind raced. Could this man be believed? But it might make sense. At least it would explain why there was no record of assets in the Trust—perhaps they’d all been liquidated. He folded his hands on the table in front of him in an effort to control their involuntary movement. “In debt?” he asked. “To whom?”

“You don’t want to know,” Gerry said, his expression going suddenly serious.

Hayden swallowed hard, thinking of Karyn. “Unfortunately, I believe that I will need to know. The current trustee will be responsible for the debts incurred.”

“Current trustee? What poor slob did he leave in charge?”

“That,” Hayden said, a line of sweat beginning to form on his upper lip, “is none of your business.”

“Well,” Gerry replied, “if it makes you feel any better, these people that Billy owed money to? They’re not going to come forward for their payout. Those debts were strictly confidential.”

“Confidential?”

Again Mr. Dupuy leaned forward, and Hayden caught a whiff of sweet aftershave. “I suppose it’s okay to let the cat out of the bag, now that he and his wife are no longer with us,” he said. “But Lord knows how many broken hearts old Billy left behind...”

“Broken hearts?” Hayden felt a jolt. Had William been having affairs?

“All beautiful young men, mind you. He wouldn’t settle for second best—though he didn’t deserve half of them.” Mr. Dupuy sat back, stretching his long legs. “Don’t get me wrong. Billy was handsome enough. It was no problem fixing him up on dates. The only problem was that he had a nasty habit of dumping them. Then it got complicated. He had to pay out the hush money—didn’t want ‘em telling, now did he?”

Hayden felt the blood draining from his face. “And you?” he asked. “Why did you do all of this...fixing? What was in it for you?”

Mr. Dupuy smiled again. “You silver spoon types just don’t get it, do you?” he sneered. “What on God’s green earth do you *think* was in it for me? William Watson had money. He had lots of secrets. And I knew them all. Why else do you think he listed me on the trust?”

Hayden leaned forward now, angry. “But what you don’t realize, Mr. Dupuy, is that you have just drawn suspicion upon yourself.”

“Suspicion?”

“There may very well be an investigation into the unexpected deaths of William and his wife,” Hayden said. “And what I know about you now could be highly incriminating.”

Gerry’s reaction to this news was not at all what Hayden had expected. “Hah!” he laughed, slamming his open palm down on the table. “Killing a guy and his wife just to inherit his debts, which, as his fixer and one-man dating service, you happen to be the only one fully privy to? Even *I’m* not that stupid!” He pushed his chair back from the table. “Just try and find some assets in that guy’s name!” he said. “I’m telling you, he bled it all dry.” He

stood up, tugging at his tee shirt, smoothing it down over his flat stomach. “Hey, you’re not too bad looking for an old coot,” he said. “Let me know if you need anything, will you?”

And with that, Gerry Dupuy strode back to the door, pausing to turn around for a final pronouncement. “And you can tell that faggot Tommy Willoughby, he’s outed now too!” Around the room, heads turned. But only for a moment, before burying themselves once more in open newspapers.

As Gerry Dupuy pushed out through the door, Hayden found his hands balling into fists. He got up. He needed to get out of this stuffy café, clear his head. . . . But as he wended his way down Magazine Street and entered the maze of narrow roads that constituted the Garden District, his thoughts only became more muddled. In his mind, he was back at Harvard, back on those tree-lined campus streets. Beside him was his roommate, a cold beer in one hand and a cigarette in the other. Charlie Greene—the first person he’d ever trusted with his heart.

Shy and introverted, trained by his father to distrust women, Hayden had arrived at Harvard an open book. Whenever he’d thought about it later—something he’d tried his best not to do—he’d realized it was no surprise that he’d fallen for his freshman roommate. Everyone had loved Charlie—the instigator, the life of every party. His mistake had been believing that Charlie loved him back. He’d believed it with all his heart—until Charlie had gone home the summer after their junior year to “straighten out.” Hayden had never had the courage to track him down. Doggedly, he’d finished his law degree. He’d come home to the only place he knew. And after that, he’d resolved to keep his heart to himself.

Blinking back his anger, Hayden sped his pace. All these years, he’d told himself that he hadn’t just loved Charlie—he’d been *in* love. That his love had been real—not selfish or vain, certainly not the kind that William and his friend Mr. Dupuy espoused. But what exactly *was* love? Those days in the boat, adrift in the New Orleans floodwaters. . . . That moment when he’d taken a baby from the arms of its desperate mother to cradle its soft body, to feel its tiny heart beat against his own heaving chest. . . . That was more like love. He supposed now that he’d never really understood it at all. He’d lived his whole life at a distance, as though it belonged to someone else.

He looked around. These stately homes, their gracious porches, hanging pots spilling over with blossoms, open shutters and closed curtains—had he ever really known this place? There were pockets of New Orleans where illicit affairs and backroom deals were the norm. But these old District families had long ago learned to insulate themselves from all of that. They’d joined all the right clubs, associated with all the right people, donated money to all

the right causes.

He thought about Gerry Dupuy, his slick smile and slick hair. Where was he from? What did he do, when he wasn't arranging trysts for would-be victims? Mr. Dupuy wasn't out of the woods yet. He might not have killed the Watsons to get his hands on their money. But had it come down to something else altogether—revenge over the loss of a promised inheritance, a fortune squandered? And if it wasn't Mr. Dupuy himself, the man's allegations regarding William's promiscuity suggested a whole host of possible spurned lovers, any one of whom might have committed murder out of revenge.

His pulse slowing at last, Hayden felt his faculties returning. He'd always found refuge in his work. And he had, in fact, managed to keep his heart to himself...

Until just recently. Looking up, he found himself standing in front of the Watson home. Without thinking, he mounted the front steps and rang the bell. The door cracked open and the Watsons' maid, Letty Butler, peered at him from inside.

Hayden cleared his throat. "Is Miss Johnston here?" he asked.

"She's out makin' groceries right now, Mr. Kayne," Letty replied.

"Will she be back soon?"

Letty looked down at the floor. "I think so," she said. "You could wait here if you want."

"Thank you kindly, Miss Butler," Hayden said. "I think I'll take you up on that."

She ushered him inside. "You want some iced tea?" she asked.

"Oh no," Hayden replied. "I'm good, thanks." But Letty just stood there, kneading her palms, watching him as he took a seat on the small couch in the parlor. "Is something on your mind, Miss Butler?" he asked.

"I know there's some talk goin' on right now, that people think Mr. William and Miz Marian mighta been...k...ki..."

Hayden reached out to lay a reassuring hand on Letty's. "It's all conjecture at this point, Letitia," he said.

But Letty was intent on saying something. "I know it probably doesn't mean a thing," she said, still looking down as though in apology. "But there's somethin' strange Miz Karyn said...it bothered me when she said it. It *still* bothers me..."

“Miss Johnston?” As he regarded the maid’s troubled countenance, Hayden felt a strange sort of numbness wash over him, a sense of time standing still. He remembered his father, telling him about his mother’s death as they sat together in the hospital waiting room. And years later the policeman, calling to inform him of his father’s passing. You always knew, somehow, when bad news was coming.

Letty looked at him, fear showing in her eyes. “It was that day when Miz Marian died. When I saw Miz Marian on the ground, and I came out the back o’ the house and Miz Karyn was just standin’ there... Miz Karyn said something...”

Hayden grasped the arms of his chair. “What did she say?” he asked.

A tear streaked down Letty’s cheek. “She said, ‘Sorry? Is that all?’ And then somethin’ about ‘after everything you did.’”

Hayden stared at her. “She said that to Marian? But I thought she was administering CPR...”

“No,” Letty said. “It wasn’t that way. Miz Karyn saw me comin’, and *then* she went down and started pumpin’ on Miz Marian’s chest. But not until then.”

Hayden felt himself standing up. “You know, Miss Butler,” he said. “You might have misheard. But I do thank you so much for telling me this. And...and don’t worry, I’ll try and sort this out.” He reached down to smooth his slacks over his thighs. “I just realized I have another appointment,” he said. “Would you let Miss Johnston know I stopped by?”

Pacing the worn floorboards of his home office, Hayden held his hand to his forehead. His encounter with Gerry Dupuy had been disturbing enough. But now, he needed to concentrate on Karyn Johnston. He had to admit, it had bothered him that Marian had named Karyn as successor to the Watson Estate. No one seemed to understand why—not even Karyn. Or was Karyn not telling the truth? Did she, in fact, know why?

He went to his computer and once more pulled up Karyn’s resume. In Chicago she’d worked at Goldman Sachs, in the same department where William and Marian had worked when they first met. But William and Marian had married and gone off to New Orleans by the time Karyn came along... He decided to take another tack; perhaps an interview with her references might help. But a call to the office of her former boss Mr. Robert Wilkins was greeted by an out-of-office message. He switched to Aunt Mildred. An online search turned

up Mildred's address in Cleveland, but there was no phone number. At a loss and more out of habit than hopefulness, he pulled up the Clerk of Courts site for Cuyahoga County, Ohio, and keyed in the address. To his surprise, he found an entry regarding a foreclosure dispute that Mildred Johnston had had with her bank in 1969. The dispute had been settled when ownership of her West Side Cleveland home was transferred to her brother Frank Johnston of Fox Lake, IL, who had offered cash to purchase the property outright.

"Frank Johnston," Hayden murmured. He might be Karyn's father.

He refocused his search on Frank. It didn't take him long to find the article in the Chicago Sun-Times describing Frank Johnston's tragic death in 1974, a presumed suicide. The article offered some conjecture as to a possible cause. Frank had been separated from his wife for four years at the time of his death. What's more, he had recently been dismissed from his job as a loan analyst at Goldman Sachs. Hayden shook his head. Frank had worked at Goldman Sachs, in the same department and at the same time as Marian. Most likely she'd known him. And the newspaper article carried salacious hints of an extramarital affair...

Pacing again, Hayden tried to do the math in his head. Might Karyn have been Marian's daughter by Frank? No. The dates were all wrong; Marian would have had to give birth at the tender age of eleven. But perhaps there was still too much coincidence here. It might make sense that Karyn, who seemed to have nothing going on in Chicago, would look for a new life elsewhere. But why had Karyn come to New Orleans, a city so recently ravaged by floods, a place where she knew no one, to work a job with little pay and no reward? Had she made a point of seeking out Marian? And above all, why had she said what Letty had repeated?

After everything you did...

There were lots of questions. But it seemed that only one truly needed answering: What had Marian done?

"Somethin' botherin' you, Mr. Kayne?"

Hayden wheeled around. "What?"

Richard, the old black man who'd become a fixture in the house ever since their shared adventures after Katrina, emerged from the relative dim of the hallway.

"My man," Hayden said, "didn't I tell you to always knock first?"

Sauntering into the office, Richard appraised the mess of papers on the desk, the files arranged haphazardly on the floor. “You ain’t usually home mid-day,” Richard said with his usual slow smile. “Look here now, how about you and me enjoy a little aperitif?”

Hayden smiled back. “You know I don’t drink this early in the day, Richard.”

“Just me then. I sure would love some o’ that fine scotch you keep for the rich folks!”

“All right,” Hayden said. “A small glass couldn’t hurt.” He went to the bar and poured Richard a single shot. “Here you are!”

Richard raised the glass in a mock toast before bringing it to his lips. “Mmmm,” he said. “Now that’s the good stuff.” He regarded Hayden with a critical eye. “Mr. Kayne,” he said. “I know what you’re worried about.”

“You do?”

“Them Watsons. It’s all the talk in town. And I know you’d like to be the one to figure it out.” Richard took another sip, closed his eyes, savoring it. Then he sprawled lazily on Hayden’s worn leather couch. “Listen here now,” he said. “I don’t know much. But in all these years I did learn one thing.”

Despite himself, Hayden laughed. “And what’s that?”

“If you got a question, the answer is always in the same place. Right there in front of your face.”

Hayden grimaced. Across the room, his phone rang.



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