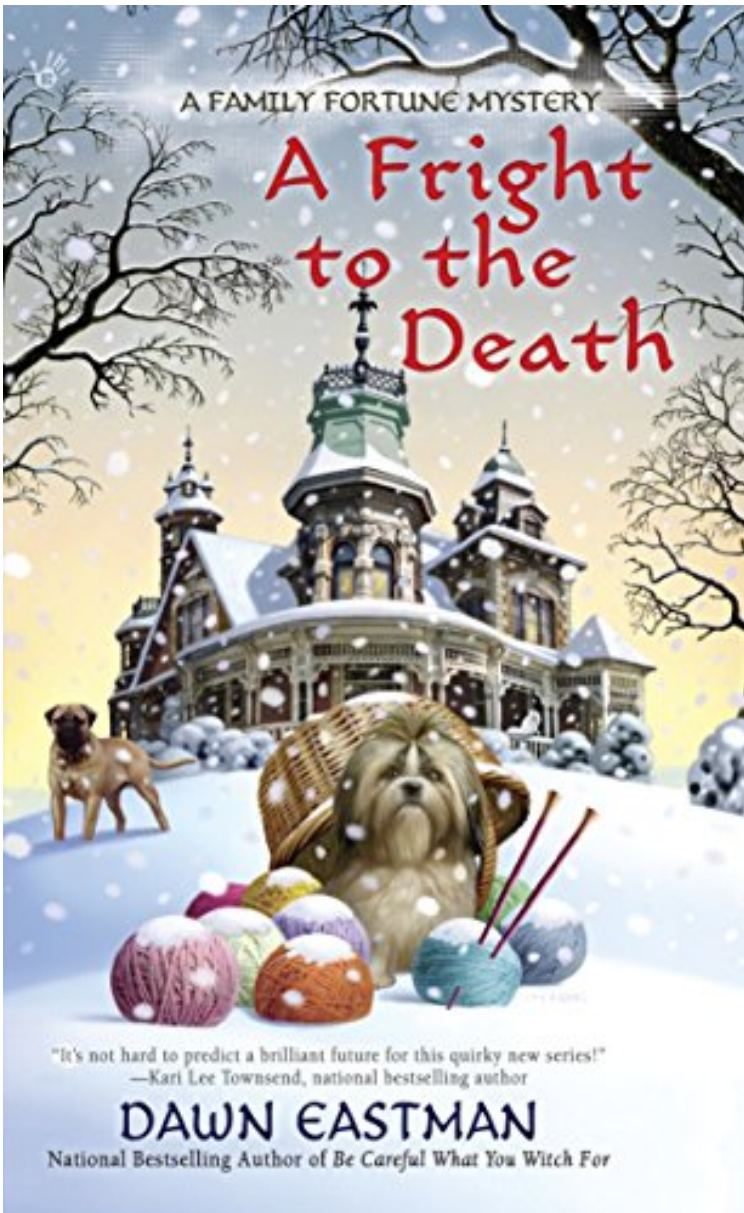


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A Fright to the Death



Par Dawn Eastman
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurFrom the author of Be Careful What You Witch For, here is the newest Family Fortune Mystery, starring former cop Clyde Fortune, whosnowbound with her kooky family in a creepy castleis climbing the walls and combing the halls, looking for a cold-blooded killerAfter their flight to Mexico is cancelled, Clyde and her detective boyfriend, Mac, end up snowed in with their families at a supposedly haunted hotel. Clydes tarot card reading mother, Rose, is making dire predictions for the weekend, and self-proclaimed pet psychic Aunt Vi is enchanted by the legend of the hotels ghostuntil the power goes out and a body turns up.With a hotel full of stranded suspects, Clyde will have to draw on all her skillsboth the police

ones shed rather forget and the psychic ones shed rather ignore to solve the bone-chilling mystery before someone else gets iced. From the Paperback edition. Extrait Acknowledgments I knew Mac scoffed at all things psychic, but why must he taunt the fates? I can't believe we're finally getting away, he said with a boyish grin and took my hand. This is going to be fantastic. I smiled and hoped he would stop talking. The man had no sense of jinxes and self-preservation. We were barely twenty minutes down the snowy tree-lined highway away from Crystal Haven. Away from my parents, my aunt, his mother, my nephew, and two spoiled dogs. The back-patting phase of the trip sat happily in our future. Sometime after I had returned to my small Victorian, Mac had returned to his cottage, and we had shared the photos with our inquisitive families. We had decided to take my new Tahoe on the trip. Mac's pickup truck and my ancient Jeep seemed inappropriate for a potentially icy drive to Chicago. The unfamiliar vehicle made it feel like we were already far from home. I looked out the window at the gray sky of a Michigan winter. It had snowed almost daily in January. Mac and I got through it by plotting our escape over a few chilly evenings as the white fluff had piled up outside. I wasn't just excited to get away; I was desperate. Between Mac's job as a homicide detective, my live-in teenage nephew, and the rest of my interfering family that lived a stone's throw away and had no qualms about stopping by, we had little time to spend alone together. Plus, the pressure to either return to my own police career or find a new job that didn't involve walking dogs increased daily. I was more than ready to escape my everyday life and all I wanted was to step off that airplane in Mexico with Mac, alone. I craved it so badly that I felt certain I might hex it. What can I say? A life with psychics and tarot readers had instilled a strong superstitious streak. And the longer I stayed in Crystal Haven, the worse it got. But, we were together. Finally. And we were about to jet away from winter for a week. Ignoring caution to join his reckless glee, I said, What should we do first when we get there? Mac ticked an eyebrow upward in an exaggerated leer. His blue eyes sparkled and the lines around his eyes deepened. He spent so much of his life keeping every emotion in check that I cherished the moments he relaxed and allowed his humor to take center stage. Oh, nice. I walked into that one. I laughed, relaxing in my seat. I reached for my phone as it buzzed in my pocket. After that, I said as I clicked the phone open. My grin faded and my mood nosedived when I saw the message. Mac, pull over up here. I pointed to an exit just outside of Kalamazoo. Mac turned away from the road long enough to see the concern on my face. He glanced at the phone in my hand and flicked the turn signal. Was that Seth? Is something wrong? I shook my head. I wished it were from my nephew, Seth. The text was from the airline. Our flight got canceled. It says due to weather. Mac pulled into a gas station parking lot and turned off the ignition. I looked out the windshield at the leaden gray sky releasing a few small snowflakes. Channel 8's weather guy hadn't said there was going to be a bad storm. Maybe we could take another flight. The high-pitched ping of the rapidly cooling engine broke the silence. I immediately tried to pull up the airline's website on my phone. Mac leaned back and rubbed his jaw, staring out the window. I was really looking forward to getting away from this. His gesture encompassed everything outside of the car. And having a break from your family, he said quietly. I looked away from my phone and put my hand on his shoulder. I know. Me, too. I'm pretty sick of snow. And I know my family has been a handful. I'm tired of them, too. Living in Crystal Haven, a town full of psychics, had its unique set of drawbacks. And so did growing up in a family that made its livelihood off of psychic messages and tarot cards. I'm checking to see if there are other flights. Hope is not lost. I waved my phone at him. I was waiting for the website to load when Mac opened the door and startled me. Let's go inside and regroup, he said. I followed, thinking that it was typical of our luck that our vacation would consist of diet soda and popcorn in a roadside gas station. I thought I heard the fates giggling. The balding, chubby proprietor smiled at us as we entered. Mac made a beeline for the cheddar popcorn, his go-to stress indulgence. I grabbed a diet soda and a package of almonds. Did it say when they might reschedule? Mac asked. He put an arm around my shoulder, leaned down, and squinted at my phone as we walked to the counter. I shook my head. No, and I can't load the airline website. We placed our items on the counter and the man began scanning them into the register. I hope you two are headed home before the storm hits, he said. Mac and I exchanged a worried glance. Mac handed over a twenty. Storm? The man looked at us over his glasses. He turned his small TV to face us. The sound was muted, but we saw the news crawl along the bottom of the screen: **BLIZZARD WARNING.** They say Chicago's already socked in. Airports closed and the roads are packed with people trying to get home. It should be here in a couple of hours. His voice held a note of excitement at being able to break the news. I was leaning into Mac and felt him go very still. My own shoulders slumped as I saw our vacation dissolve. The man smiled kindly at me. You were headed to Chicago? He slid Mac's change across the counter. I nodded, and swallowed hard. Mac pocketed his money, slung an arm across my shoulders, and

steered me out of the store. As the door closed behind us, he leaned close to my ear and whispered, I have a plan. I stopped walking, which forced him to turn to look at me. A plan? I asked. Mac definitely had a romantic side, but I expected romance along the Mexican seashore, not along Route 131. When did he come up with a plan? He moved his arm down to settle around my waist. Just relax, I've got this. He opened my door for me and swept his arm out to gesture me inside. He bowed slightly before swinging the door closed. I grinned and sat back in my seat, excited now by the new adventure. I opened the weather app on my phone and scrolled through the many warnings and alerts caused by the snow currently pounding Chicago. A storm in Chicago would often head across Lake Michigan and slam into the west coast of Michigan. So while Chicago was digging out, we would be hunkering down to wait out the weather. They're saying we should start seeing serious snow by later this afternoon. I shut my phone off. We'll be safe and dry by then but not in Crystal Haven, Mac said. I sat back and watched the white landscape scroll past my window. My attempts at questioning were met with off-key humming. Even though I'd grown up in Crystal Haven, I didn't know the Kalamazoo area very well and had no idea where he planned to take us. Twenty minutes and miles of white fields and forests later we were nowhere near anything that looked like a city. We passed a sporting goods store touting the exciting sport of ice fishing and snowmobile rentals. Mac pulled down a dirt road that headed into dense woods. I hoped he wasn't planning to camp, even if a cozy cabin was involved. We routinely lost power during storms even in Crystal Haven; I could imagine what a cabin in the woods in February would be like. Mac... , I said, and couldn't quite hide the nervous quaver. He steered the car around a corner, the trees gave way to a wide clearing, and a beautiful snowcapped castle appeared. Its windows glowed gold in the afternoon gloom. Big wet snowflakes had begun to fall and added to the charm. It sat on a hill above us and as Mac followed the road that took us around to the back parking area, I leaned forward to get a better look out the front window. It was big, but not enormous like some of the European castles I'd seen in books. It sported a large tower turret on the front and smaller turrets sticking off the side of the bigger one with a wraparound porch and pointed roofline. What is this place? This is Carlisle Castle, Mac said.

It was built by a furniture tycoon during the late 1800s. It's still owned by the same family and they converted it into a hotel about ten years ago. What do you think? Snow-covered and surrounded by tall pines, it looked like a storybook Christmas castle. Maybe I had misjudged Mac's planning-on-the-fly abilities. I smiled and squeezed his hand. Who needs Mexico? I said. This definitely makes up for the canceled flight. How did you know about it? Do you think they'll have a room? I saw a brochure back at the gas station and remembered someone mentioning it, Mac said. It didn't occur to me that it would be full.... The full parking lot ramped up my concern. Mac pulled in and found a spot as far from the entrance as possible. We exited the car and looked up at the castle. Mac stood behind me with his arms around my waist. It's not Mexico, he said, but it's not Crystal Haven, either. We headed toward the entrance holding hands. I glanced down the row of vehicles and saw an orange smart car. It looked just like my mom's. I shrugged off a brief flash of worry and followed Mac through the rapidly falling snow. Inside, the entryway glowed from Victorian lamps reflecting off the dark wood of the front desk, tucked beneath a wide curving staircase. I imagined a cozy weekend with Mac, curled up by the fire. Surely there was a fireplace somewhere and not dealing with dogs, nephews, parents, aunts, or anyone but Mac. We shook the snow off our coats and stamped our feet. At the desk, a young man smiled at us from behind a laptop and Tiffany lamp. Hello, welcome to Carlisle Castle, he said. His name tag read: WALLACE PRESCOTT. He wore round glasses, a bow tie, and a thatch of dark hair flopped over one eye. Whoa, cool! he said as I stopped in front of the desk. Your eyes are two different colors! Wallace pointed at my eyes and squinted his own as he examined me. He wasn't the first person to announce it to me as if I hadn't noticed in the past thirty years that one eye was bright blue, the other brown. Mac cleared his throat and Wallace seemed to remember that staring at the customers was not in his job description. Mac asked about a room for the weekend. Wallace's smile fled. I'm sorry, we're completely booked. We have a group here this weekend and all the rooms are taken.... Wallace clicked on his laptop but shook his head the whole time. Let me check some other nearby hotels for you. I looked at the weather channel before you came in and they say once the snow starts we'll get two inches an hour. Just as Mac turned to me to discuss our predicament, we heard, I knew it! I felt Mac stiffen next to me as my stomach dropped. We both turned in the direction of the voice and, as I had already surmised, there stood my Aunt Vi. At five foot two, she was shorter than me by several inches. She wore her gray hair in a long braid down her back and favored brightly colored skirts with layers of cardigans. Like my mother, she was in her seventies, but refused to acknowledge it. I just had a feeling your flight would be canceled, Vi said as she rushed toward us. This is a great place, don't you think? She waved her arms to encompass the entire castle. I can't believe you

came here! Are you staying for the whole weekend? This'll be a hoot! Wait til I tell your mom and Lucille. Lucille? I squeaked. Vi cocked her head at me. Remember I said I was going to ask her to come with us since shes such a good knitter? Mac turned to me, his eyes a bit wild. My mother is here? he said. It came back to me in snippets. I'd been so excited about my escape from a snow-covered and frozen Crystal Haven that I hadn't paid much attention. I remembered talk about yarn and knitting classes and how my dad and my nephew, Seth, would have a boys weekend... The knitting conference is... here? I asked. Vi nodded and grinned. You should see this place, Clyde, its so... castle-y. Wally here will give you a tour. She nodded toward Wallace. Ms. Greer, I don't have a room for them, Wallace said. And its Wallace. He pointed to his name tag. She looked him up and down and then turned away. Oh, don't worry, she said. They can stay with us. Rose and I have double beds and Lucille has two twins in her room. Clyde can stay with us and Mac can stay with Lucille. It'll be great! Mac and I exchanged a terrified glance. Vi was unstoppable when she got an idea in her head and we both felt the tide of this vacation washing farther out to sea. We can't impose like that, Vi, I began. Wallace was just checking some other hotels... Vi shook her head and crossed her arms. Nonsense. Have you looked out there? She gestured at the window. You'll never get anywhere and then you'll be stuck in the woods in a blizzard. She pointed a knobby finger at me. No. You can stay here at least until the weather clears. Its really no bother. She put her hand on Mac's arm. Mac and I looked outside to see heavy flakes pouring down. Wally cleared his throat and said, Sometimes the road does become impassable in a bad storm. Let me just talk to Mac, I said and we walked a few steps away from the desk. Vi crossed her arms and tapped her foot. I put my hand on his back and turned away from our audience. What do you think? Mac pressed his lips together and then let out a breath of air. Well, its the exact opposite of the way I thought I'd be spending the evening, but I'd hate to get stranded on the road somewhere. I snuck a look at Vi over Mac's shoulder. We can stand it for one night and we'll figure out where to go in the morning. How long can a snowstorm last, right? We walked back to the desk and I nodded to Vi and Wally. You make a good case for safety, Mac said. We'll stay tonight. Vi clapped her hands and grinned. How about that tour, Wally? Vi asked. I'll come along. I have a few questions. Plus I want to hear about the ghost again. Ghost? Mac said. Vi nodded. Its a great story. Im trying to talk the knitters into doing a sance. Come on, lets go! Wally hurried out from behind the desk in an attempt to take control of the tour. He smoothed his jacket, and smiled at us. Mac took my hand and glanced longingly at the door. We heard it rattle on its hinges as a gust of wind struck it full force. Our guide led us toward the back of the hotel and to the right, where we came to a restaurant surrounded by windows. It had the feel of a greenhouse except today everything was white outside. Small tables were scattered about the room. Black tablecloths topped with white squares lent a more cosmopolitan feel to the space than I had expected. The walls displayed black-and-white photos of Paris, and the large windows shared a view of the back of the property, which sloped down toward the woods. The snow was picking up and any lingering thoughts of escaping the knitters convention fled as I watched it fall. This is our restaurant. Wally swept his arm in the direction of the dining room. Complimentary breakfast is here from seven until ten. Usually we recommend reservations for dinner, but I don't think that will be a problem today. He chuckled and then turned it into a cough when no one joined him. Wally led us out of the dining room and gestured toward a hallway outside the door and said that it led to the kitchen and offices. He took us to the back door, where a small area had been fitted with hooks for coats. Sometimes our guests prefer to leave coats and such here so they can grab them quickly if they want to enjoy the gardens. Wally pointed to the coats, scarves, and hats hanging on hooks. It looked like there were quite a few knitters here if the amount of outerwear was any indication. I didn't imagine we would choose to enjoy the gardens on our brief stay during a blizzard, but we shrugged out of our jackets and found hooks for them. Mac took a slim envelope out of his inside coat pocket. I saw my name scrawled on the front. He folded it and stuffed it in his back jeans pocket without looking at me. Mac felt more comfortable expressing himself in writing and I had been the recipient of a whole box full of notes over the years. I decided to pretend I hadn't seen it and let him give it to me when he felt the time was right. But I did wonder what could be so difficult to say that he had brought a letter with him on vacation. We followed Wally back out toward the front and to the other side of the entry hall. This was the room I'd imagined when we'd first pulled up to the building. Rich mahogany wainscoting and subtly patterned wallpaper made the room feel cozy. Dark reds and greens accented the deep leather couches and chairs placed about the room in conversational arrangements. Worn Persian rugs anchored the seating areas. Heavy red velvet curtains looked as if they could insulate the room from any storm. An enormous fireplace with a bright and cheerful fire glowing within beckoned me toward the couch. I sighed and squeezed Mac's hand, for the moment forgetting that we were leaving as soon as possible. Isn't this

terrific? Vi said in my ear. I glanced upward in a reflex eye roll and saw something pink on the chandelier. What's that? I pointed. You spotted it! Vi said. She patted my back. Wally rubbed the back of his neck and shook his head. Spotted what? Mac craned his neck upward to see what we were looking at. I noticed that it wasn't just something pink. It was also something purple and teal and lime green. Every arm of the beautiful crystal chandelier had a small tube of knitting attached. Yarn bombing, Vi said. She crossed her arms and nodded decisively. What bombing? Mac said. It's a knitter thing, Vi said, and patted his arm in a reassuring way. I was pretty sure no one had patted Mac's arm in a reassuring way in many years. When a bunch of knitters get together we just have to show off. There's a contest for the most interesting and difficult yarn bomb. It's supposed to be a secret until the last day when each knitter takes credit for her pieces. So you'll see lots of little knitted items all over the castle this weekend. This one wasn't easy to pull off. They must have gotten the maintenance guy involved.... Vi walked in circles under the chandelier to get a better look at the knitting. I would have liked to see that. He's a hottie. Are these normal knitters? Mac whispered to me. I shrugged and moved a little closer to him. He moved his hand from the small of my back and put his arm around my shoulders. Wally cleared his throat and gestured toward the door. Mac and I followed quickly. I reconsidered the idea of braving the storm to go anywhere else. We walked to the front of the hotel again and up the wide, dark wood staircase. Just as in the lounge, mahogany wainscoting gave way to Victorian-style wallpaper halfway up the wall. Torches had been placed along the hallway every ten feet or so. Fortunately, they were electric, but the effect was still one of walking into the past. We turned the corner at the top of the staircase and the sensation intensified. Tapestries hung from the walls and a large stained glass window loomed at the end of the hall. The weak outside light was unable to do it justice. I was no expert on antiques, but if any of the décor was as old as it looked, the furnishings alone must be worth a fortune. Wally led us down the hall that ran along the front of the building. His description of the paintings, tapestries, and sculptures solidified the sense that we were in a uniquely preserved Victorian mansion. Here's your room, Ms. Fortune. He pointed to the left. Mr. McKenzie, you'll be in here. He showed Mac the room two doors down. Wally pointed to the end of the hallway. And that door leads to the turret room. His voice became quiet and his expression indicated we should know what he meant by turret room. Tell them the ghost story, Vi said while bouncing on her toes like a six-year-old. Wally lowered his voice. Ms. Greer, I don't think I should have told you that story. I don't know if Ms. Carlisle wants to advertise the ghost. Oh, come on, Wally. Vi gave him a good slug in the arm. Everyone in Kalamazoo has heard the story. There's no way she's going to get everyone to un-hear it. He sighed and rubbed his arm. He glanced over his shoulder. Okay, but not here, she might hear us. Mac sighed. The ghost? I whispered. I didn't believe in ghosts, per se, but in my anti-jinx state of mind decided to keep that to myself. Wally shook his head. Ms. Carlisle. Let's go in here, Vi said. She led us to her door. All the rooms are decorated in a different theme. We got the red Victorian room. It's the best. She glanced at Mac. Yours is good, too. Green, I think. She took her key and opened the door, gesturing us inside. Mac hadn't said a word, which indicated his level of shock that his plans had fallen apart so completely. Wally sheepishly followed Vi inside before shutting the door behind us. The room was larger than I'd expected, and definitely red. And Victorian. Dark, carved wooden headboards loomed over the two beds. Red and white floral bedspreads matched the curtains, swags, and tassels that framed the windows. I crossed to the small sitting area and a window that faced the back of the property. Snowcapped fir trees and white-outlined branches were just visible through the falling flakes. The tops of the cars had disappeared under a blanket of white. You can have that bed, Vi said. She pointed to the bed nearest the window. She stood next to me and looked out. It's getting pretty bad out there. She turned and rubbed her hands together. I'll have to empty one of the drawers. I brought a lot of yarn, but I can store it downstairs where we have the workshop. Mom's tarot cards covered the coffee table in her standard pattern. I looked away, not wanting to know what dire predictions they held. Vi had evidently been using the pendulum and it sat waiting in the middle of its yes-no cross. Wally's eyes darted around the room. Okay, tell us. Vi sat in an armchair and gestured at the rest of us to sit. All right, but I have to make it quick, Wally said. I'm supposed to be at the front desk. Vi shook her head. I don't think you'll get any more customers today. She waved her arm toward the window and the full-on winter storm that raged outside. Wally's mouth tightened at the corners. He took a deep breath. Alastair Carlisle built the castle in 1895, after a trip to Scotland. He and his wife, Ada, had fallen in love with the castles over there and wanted to build one of their own. Ada had inherited a large piece of forested land from her father, and the two of them designed the house together using her land and his money. Vi waved her hand in a move-along gesture. Wally grimaced and continued. During the five years it took to build the castle, Ada fell ill. By the time it was completed, she was essentially bedridden. The

couple had two small boys and needed to hire a governess to watch them and begin their schooling. Alastair built a small cottage on the grounds for the governess and designed the turret bedroom for his wife. You can probably tell where this story is going, Vi broke in. Mr. Carlisle and the governess had an affair and thought that his invalid wife would never be the wiser. I was getting to that. Wally cleared his throat. And there's no proof... Well, Ada was no dummy, Vi said, ignoring him. Even though she was sick, it didn't mean she was stupid. She figured out what he was up to and she was furious. Wally opened his mouth to continue the story. Vi held up her hand. She had nothing to do up in her turret room other than knit and contemplate her own death and feel betrayed by her husband, Vi said. So, she hatched a plan. We don't know that, Ms. Greer, Wally said. Vi crossed her arms, and narrowed her eyes at him. The rumors say she told the nanny she had put a curse on her. The Victorians were very interested in spirits and many believed in ghosts. Mrs. Carlisle said if anything happened to her, she would return and curse the nanny and her husband. Vi nodded to Wally to tell his part of the tale. Wally continued. According to the story, by the time the castle was finished, Ada and Alastair were barely speaking. Her illness left her confined to her room, where she heard about the happenings in the castle from her trusted maid. The governess took over the care of the young boys and eventually, Wally said and paused with a severe look at Vi, rumors said, Alastair fell in love with her. Vi nodded to encourage him. One night, in the dead of winter, Ada drowned in her own bathtub, Wally said. She had sent the maid to get some hot cocoa and by the time the servant returned, Ada was dead. Of course, there was an investigation, but they found no evidence of foul play. The police assumed she had passed out from her liberal use of narcotics and drowned by accident. Narcotics? Mac asked. Wally nodded, and began to speak when Vi interrupted again. Calm down, Kojack. They all took laudanum back then. She waved her hand dismissively. It wasn't like she was dealing drugs. I placed a calming hand on Mac's arm. Not that I needed to. There were many things I loved about Mac, but his restraint in dealing with Vi was definitely at the top of my list. Wally raised his eyebrows at Vi. Vi ignored him and took over the story. Since then, rumors have flown and people say that Alastair or the nanny actually killed her off so they could be together. Her ghost looks out the upper window of the turret room and some people have seen it wandering the halls and climbing the stairs. Why would her ghost be walking the halls if she was bedbound? I said. Vi held my gaze. You know as well as I do that ghosts can do anything they want. It's one of the perks of being a ghost. I hadn't realized there were perks... , I said. Mac cleared his throat and glowered at us both. Vi resumed her tale. Tragically, the nanny died about a year later. She had moved in to the main house and she fell down the stairs on a perfectly clear night. No one knows why she was out of bed, or what she was doing wandering the halls. The people in town said it was the ghost of Mrs. Carlisle who pushed her. Alastair never got over the double loss of his wife and his mistress. Alleged mistress, Wally said. Vi narrowed her eyes at him. Alleged mistress, Vi said. The boys grew up and had their own scandals. Prohibition was very lucrative. Wally stood, interrupting her. I really need to get back to the desk. I'll let the chef know there will be two more for dinner. This is gonna be great! Vi said. 4 After Wally left, Violet dragged Mac and me back downstairs to meet the knitters and to let Lucille know the good news that she and Mac would be sharing a room. The knitters were ensconced in the library toward the back of the hotel. Vi led us to the doorway and swung her arm to usher us in. Mac stood motionless in the doorway and I bumped into him. I peeked over his shoulder to see what had stopped him. The room held more yarn than I had ever seen in my life. I had been to many yarn stores as a child when Violet had dragged me along on her shopping trips, but this was overwhelming. Skeins and balls of yarn congregated in soft, fuzzy piles. Eight women sat scattered around the room, all holding a piece of knitting while a very attractive instructor spoke in that strange knitterly language. She said things like keep your tension steady, don't forget the yarn over in the middle of the fourth row, and I have a great new cable needle to try, plus I'll show you how to cable without a needle. You'll love the freedom. The library was smaller than the lounge, with a scaled-down fireplace and walls covered in bookshelves. Ornate Victorian wallpaper in bright green and blue covered whatever wall space was left. Two small couches and several chairs made a conversational arrangement in the center of the room. It still retained the masculine aura of pipe smoke, whiskey, and leather, and must have been Alastair's personal refuge. He likely would have been outraged by the invasion of fluffy balls of mohair. The knitters had dragged in some dining room chairs to accommodate their group. A wall of windows showed large flakes settling on the trees. Mac seemed paralyzed and I pushed him to get him to move into the room. Either our tussling or Vi's loud *ahem* caught the interest of the knitters. They all turned in our direction. Mom jumped up, letting her knitting fall to the floor. Clyde! Mac! What are you doing here? Mom said as she approached. Is something wrong? Is Seth okay? Is it your father? She clutched my arm, and her forehead crinkled in dismay. The cards warned me

that something terrible would happen this weekend....She and Vi shared similar delicate features but rather than a braid and brightly colored skirts, Mom pulled her hair back in a bun and favored either tracksuits (she had one in every color) or khakis and blouses. Mom, everyone is fine. Our flight was canceled and we came here to stay because of the storm. Mom relaxed her grip on my arm, and a smile spread across her face. Oh, how fun! You can finally learn to knit. Lucille was just saying how she thinks you're a natural. Mom leaned closer to me and lowered her voice. I didn't want to burst her bubble and tell her you don't like knitting. Lucille had joined us at the door by this time. She was my height, very thin, and wore her silver hair short and spiky. She turned to Mac and said, Phillip, I'm so glad to see you. I was worried about you flying in the storm. Mac's face turned a bit pink as it always did when his mother called him Phillip. Hi, Mom, he said. Two of the other knitters, about the same age as Mom, Vi, and Lucille had joined us at the door. The younger ones showed a bit more decorum and remained in their seats. One of them had tattoos snaking up both arms, one sported hot pink spiky hair, and the other looked like a human Tinkerbell tiny with a blond pixie cut. Oh, Lucille. Is this your son? a short round woman with bright red lipstick on her lips and teeth asked. He's much more handsome than you said. She batted her eyes at Mac. Mac stepped back, onto my foot, and recovered by draping an arm over my shoulder. Lucille introduced the woman as Mavis Poulson and claimed Mac as her son. Mavis looked me over and returned to her seat without further comment. Her friend, Selma Stone, thin, tall, and entirely beige, shook my hand and then followed Mavis back to her seat. The other knitters said hello and I quickly forgot their names in the sea of comments and yarn. Okay everyone, let's get back to our projects! The instructor clapped her hands. We only have a few more minutes to work on them before dinner. She walked over to us and smiled. Hello. I'm Isabel Keane. She was petite, with short dark hair and large, expressive eyes. She had tossed a multicolored scarf artfully around her neck. She shook my hand briefly and then took Mac's hand and held on to it. It's lovely to meet you... both, she said. Mom, Vi, and Lucille had returned to their chairs as instructed. Isabel asked us if we'd like to join them in a knitting lesson. Mac shook his head. We smiled and backed out of the room. I don't know if I can do this for the whole weekend, Mac said. My mother is here and that woman looked at me like I was dessert. I noticed. She's very pretty. Who? Isabel. No, not her. Mavis with the lipstick. I smiled. Oh, her. I don't think you have anything to worry about. I'm sure you can outrun her. Let's go talk to Wally and see when this storm is supposed to end. Maybe we can book another hotel and leave first thing in the morning. He steered me back toward the front of the building. We stopped when we got to the turn in the hallway. Any idiot could do your job. I don't know why you can't! a shrill voice announced from around the corner. You must be a special kind of idiot. I glanced at Mac. I didn't want to embarrass whoever was being yelled at by walking in on this scolding, but I wanted to stop it as well. Mac and I nodded at each other and swung around the corner. A young woman in a maids uniform stood alone in the hall but I caught a glimpse of shiny black heels as they went up a nearby staircase. The woman scrubbed at her eyes and turned away from us as we approached. Are you okay? I said to her. She nodded and sniffed. I'm fine, ma'am. Thank you. She smoothed her skirt and walked down the hallway away from the stairway. Mac sighed and shook his head. Let's go. He tugged on my arm as I watched the young woman turn the corner at the end of the hall. ***Wally clacked away on his keyboard as we approached. He flipped it shut when he spotted us. How can I help you? Do you have a weather report? Mac asked. I just checked the radar. Wally shook his head. It doesn't look good. High winds and more snow tonight. They say it will be blizzard conditions in another hour or so. The wind rattled the windows to punctuate Wally's claim. Mac slumped. How long is it supposed to last? They say it could blow through overnight, unless it meets another storm front they're watching from the south. If they meet, the whole thing could stall right over us and then they don't know how long it will last. The newspeople are saying everyone should check their supplies and stay off the roads. I glanced at Mac and felt my shoulders droop. Mac's grimace reflected my own emotions. When would we escape? We're having a cocktail party tonight to kick off the knitting conference and Isabel Keane's new book. I'm sure you'd both be welcome, Wally said. He tilted his head and gave a sympathetic smile. Mac blew out air, but then pulled himself to his full height. I'll go grab our suitcases before the weather gets even worse. I'll help you. Wally hurried from behind the desk. Thank you, I said. I followed them to the back door, where they donned coats and hats. The snow crunched underfoot as they stepped into the parking lot. A gust of wind almost pulled the door out of my grasp and I wrestled it closed as they made their way to my SUV. Other than my toothbrush, there was very little in my Mexico suitcase that would be useful in a snowbound castle. I had the jeans I was wearing and one other long-sleeved T-shirt I had planned to wear on the plane ride home. The rest was swimsuits, shorts, and tank tops. I opened the door again when I heard them approach. Stepping back, I barely avoided the

spray of snow as they brushed it off while still outside. I'll set these in your rooms while you're in the lounge unless you need something. Snapping open the pull handles on the suitcases, Wally nodded toward the stairs. Mac echoed my thoughts and said, I'm not sure I'll use any of it here we were headed to warmer weather. Wally dragged the wheeled suitcases down the hall. Mac pulled me into a side hug and dropped his voice. I think I'm going to need a drink to get through the rest of the evening. We approached the lounge and peeked inside. Women were scattered throughout the room with drinks and balls of yarn. Apparently the knitting wasn't limited to the workshop room. Mac and I took a deep breath and squared our shoulders. There you are! Mom said when she spotted us. Mac nodded to her and planted a kiss on the top of my head before heading to the drinks table. I held onto his hand as he walked away, feeling that this was the last moment of any semblance of a vacation. I turned to my mom with a forced smile. She leaned toward me and said, Vi is going to tell you that she knew your flight would be canceled, but that's just because the tarot had indicated that something would happen to ruin your trip. She used her I'm-sorry-things-didn't-go-as-planned smile. She patted my shoulder. I'm sure you and Mac can take another trip. And I'd rather you were safe. If I thought you were on an airplane in this kind of weather... She put a hand to her chest in a dramatic display of distress. A few months ago, Mom's constant worry would have irritated, but now I understood its roots. Neila Whittle, who was helping me understand my own psychic gifts, had once predicted that Mom would attend a funeral for one of her children. It was Neila's dubious talent to sense when a parent might lose a child. I had yet to discuss Neila with my mother, unsure if she would be thrilled I was pursuing my gifts or furious I was spending time with Neila. As if proximity would make her prediction come true. But Neila had helped me and I felt I was finally gaining control of some of the premonitions that came unbidden in dreams or flashes of history when touching an object, and I was better able to find lost items. For whatever that was worth. Mac caught my eye from across the room and held up a glass. I nodded gratefully and he turned to fix my drink. Thoughts of Neila reminded me that I was supposed to practice whenever possible. A room full of strangers was a great opportunity to test my skills. My insights are enhanced through touch, mostly skin-to-skin contact. In my days with the police it was often difficult to maneuver that type of contact. Officers don't tend to shake hands with suspects. But the information, if it came, was invaluable and I trusted it. I brought my thoughts back to my mom, who was looking at me expectantly. Sorry, Mom, what did you say? She grinned. You can't keep your eyes off him, can you? Pardon? Mac. You're aware of every move he makes. I felt my face growing hot. I don't know what you mean. I studied her brightly colored scarf to avoid eye contact. She put her hand on my arm. It's lovely. I'm very happy for you. Thanks, Mom. I glanced toward Mac again and saw that Mavis and Selma had ambushed him. Mom followed my gaze. I'll go rescue him in a moment, she said. I want you to meet the rest of the knitters. She steered me toward the fireplace, where a trio of young women were laughing and knitting. They turned and smiled when we interrupted. This is my daughter, Clytemnestra, Mom said. I smiled while clenching my jaw, not easy to do, but I had a lot of practice. Call me Clyde, I said. I shot a look at Mom and said, Everyone does. Mom smiled at me and went to pry Mavis away from Mac. Tinkerbell stood and introduced herself as Heather. When we shook hands I focused my thoughts on that contact and opened my mind to any insights. A fizzy, bright tingling touched my face and I knew Heather was just as open and friendly as she appeared. I work as an ICU nurse, but only to support my yarn habit. The other two chuckled. I'm Amy, the pink-haired woman said. I own the local yarn store. And this is Tina. She gestured at her tattooed friend. She's a fiber artist. Tina flicked a glance in my direction and grimaced a small smile. Both held a knitting project and didn't offer to shake hands. She's the mastermind behind the yarn-bombing competition, Heather said and hooked her thumb at Tina. Isabel even donated a cool set of knitting needles as the grand prize! We were admiring the yarn bombing earlier, I said. It's a very... unique competition. Knitting isn't just for grandmas anymore, Tina said. I like to see so many new people embracing it and using knitting to make an artistic statement and bring awareness. I wasn't sure what kind of awareness was related to colored tubes on chandeliers, but sensed this sentiment would not be met with warmth. It's a fun thing to do and since the owners are knitters, Amy said. Heather interrupted. Not all of them. Clarissa has made her feelings pretty clear. Right, well, Jessica and Linda don't mind having yarn draped everywhere, Amy said. Heather turned brightly toward me. Your mother told us you're a police officer on leave. Are you planning to go back to work? Amy elbowed her in the ribs. She just met us, save the interrogation for later. Oh. Heather's smile slipped a bit but she recovered quickly. Sorry, I'm so used to asking personal questions at work that sometimes I forget... It's fine. I smiled to reassure her. But how do I answer a question I had been asking myself every day for the past couple of months? My search for a new career was reaching a critical point. My sister, Grace, had a knack for investing in the stock market and she

had parlayed my inheritance from last summer into a great nest egg. But I couldn't continue to use the money I had inherited for everyday expenses and I was getting bored. I didn't want to return to police work. I had to live in Crystal Haven for at least six more months before I could sell the house or move out an odd and meddling stipulation of the will. I chose the simplest route. I doubt I'll move back to Ann Arbor, but I'm still figuring out what I'll do next. I understand that, Tina said. I feel like I change careers almost as often as Amy changes her hair color. The three of them laughed, and I grinned at them.

Revue de presse
Praise for Dawn Eastman and the Family Fortune mysteries
A tightly plotted, character-driven triumph of a mystery... Sparkles with charmingly peculiar characters and a fascinating heroine, Clyde Fortune, who effortlessly shuffles the reader into her world like a card in a tarot deck. Eastman is fabulous!
Jenn McKinlay, New York Times bestselling author of the Library Lovers Mysteries, the Cupcake Bakery Mysteries, and the Hat Shop Mysteries
A kooky small town filled with eccentric characters, psychics, and murder make Eastman's Family Fortune Mystery series a stellar launch. Add a dog-walking ex-cop paired with her old-flame investigator, and it's not hard to predict a brilliant future for this quirky new series!
Kari Lee Townsend, national bestselling author of the Fortune Teller Mysteries and the Mind Reader Mysteries
The paranormal aspect is surprisingly realistic and matter-of-fact amongst the townspeople
Clyde proves to be a talented investigator herself with or without her extra skills, and she is a very likable heroine with the humor to cope with her eccentric relatives.
Kings River Life Magazine
Awesome new series alert!
Cozy Mystery Book s
Eastman's character development is exceptional and the incorporation of animals made this book not only fun to figure out but also, very entertaining. The psychic theme is thoroughly researched and adds another dimension to this charming whodunit.
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