

## **A murder, an ancient secret, and a puppy you can't help but love**

A frantic plea from her sister sends investigative reporter Cat Hawl on a rescue mission to Hawaii. Not only is a tea sommelier murdered, but a puppy has turned the crime scene into a dog's breakfast, and Cat's trouble-prone sister is missing. **The question: is Lani a witness or on the run?**

Since local law enforcement suspects the worst, it's up to Cat to dig deeper. With the Miss Marple Mahjong Mama's help, Cat uncovers an ancient secret rooted in the Forbidden City. Can a thousand-year-old legend be the cause of the current puppy pandemonium and mounting body count?

Join Cat as she follows the tea leaves on **a chaotic journey anyone who has ever raised a puppy will relate to.**

*Lace up your running shoes! You'll need them for this fast-paced, fun-filled mystery that will keep you on your toes! And don't be surprised as you burst out laughing at its acerbic protagonist! This is one cozy that you'll fly through and hunger for more!*

*~J.C. Eaton, author of The Sophie Kimball Mysteries, The Wine Trail Mysteries, The Charcuterie Shop Mysteries, The Marcie Rayner Mysteries*

# Puppied to Death

Cozy Dog Mystery

By C.B. Wilson

## Chapter One

Whoever said no news is good news didn't produce live TV. Visions of dead air—that long pause when every viewer thinks their TV has frozen—made my go-to morning caramel cappuccino sour in my stomach. From hound hunts to Pekinese preenings, everyone in the self-proclaimed dog-friendliest city in America had an opinion. As the editor-in-chief at KDOG, Barkview's local news and lifestyle cable television station, I decide what makes the cut. Ironic, really. You see, I am a bona fide cat lover.

My name is Cat Hawl. Honestly, I don't hate dogs. After countless canine adventures, I have developed an appreciation for many of their remarkable qualities. Make no mistake, I am not a convert, no matter what the Barkview oddsmakers might wish to believe.

I paced the length of my mahogany inlay desk, the same desk at which every KDOG editor had proofed copy for the last hundred and twenty years. In fact, except for fresh paint and a new plasma screen mounted above the conference table, this shrine to nineteenth-century Georgian style remained untouched.

I checked my internet connection. All bars read power. How could my normally overflowing email inbox be empty? Was the world sleeping like a dog?

Jennifer Moore, KDOG's general manager and the best organizer I'd ever met, peeked into my office. "Quiet day, boss?"

She'd said it like it was a good thing. I waved for her to join me. "It's unnerving."

Flanked by her twin ruby Cavalier King Charles Spaniels, Cinnamon and Nutmeg, Jennifer was a perfect fit in Barkview. Today we'd both dressed in black slacks and French-cuffed blouses. While Jennifer's bouncy dark hair brushed her shoulders, I'd pulled my tawny mane back into a truly messy bun.

"Careful what you ask for." The warning in Jennifer's Spaniel-brown eyes resonated as she slipped into the chair across from me, her tablet in hand. "When was the last time you heard from your sister?"

I slumped in my chair. My half-sister's zest for life often wreaked havoc for the rest of the world. "I haven't spoken to Lani since she finished finals, and I dropped her at the airport seventeen days ago." Mom's insistence Lani spend her summer break from Barkview University on Oahu with her had surprised me.

"But who's counting?" Jennifer smiled. "Has your mother said anything about how Lani's pet sitter/trainer job is going?"

"No news..."

Jennifer tsked. "Isn't always good news. I know Lani thought working at your aunt's kennel would prepare her, but dogs respond best to calmness and consistency."

Not exactly my sister's forte.

"Lani means well, and I'm certain she adores the dogs in her care, but she's too soft-hearted. Results are expected." As one of Barkview's many multiple-dog owners, Jennifer would know.

Lani's custom *da da da dum* ringtone saved me from a response. "Speak of the devil." I connected the call to the speaker. "Hi, stranger. Jennifer and I were just talking about you."

"She's d-dead, Cat!" Lani's voice cracked over the tinny cellphone.

"Dead?" I couldn't have heard her right. Never good in an emergency, I just stood there like a garden statue, frozen in time.

"Are you sure?" Jennifer filled in the pause.

"Y-yeah. She's lying on the floor. Her heart's not beating, but she's still warm." Lani sucked in her breath. "Th-this can't be happening to me again."

I couldn't believe it either. "Who's dead?" I finally managed to ask.

"Professor Loong, the tea sommelier."

"Tea? You mean wine sommelier." A welcome addition to my dinner table.

"No, tea sommelier," Lani insisted. "She pairs Assam or Darjeeling tea with various coho salmon preparations."

I must've gasped. Who would intentionally serve tea with fish when a perfectly good bottle of white wine was within reach?

"Trust me. It's a thing," Lani replied.

Trade tea for wine? Not in my world. Jennifer's keep-her-talking hand signal helped me to refocus.

"Mom is going to kill me," Lani moaned.

Only after I did. Lani's biology professor's murder last year had sent Barkview reeling. Not to mention nearly got me killed. I needed answers fast. "Who is Professor Loong, aside from being a tea specialist?"

Was that a faint woof? "There's a dog involved?" A rhetorical question. Canines seemed to dog me lately. "Don't tell me the professor was a client."

"Yeah. Professor Loong... No, Oolong. Down. Sorry. That's her dog. She named him after the tea."

I had more than a passing knowledge of Oolong tea. My Aunt Char, Barkview's mayor and my KDOG predecessor, had introduced me to the fruity blend known for its nutty finish while enjoying afternoon scones.

"He's trying to tell me something," Lani said.

Of course, he was. Another arf was half-drowned out by shattering glass, and Lani's screech caused my blood pressure to spike. "Are you at the crime scene?"

"I guess."

"You need to call the police," I ordered.

"Oh no! Cat. There's foam in the corner of the professor's mouth. I-I think she's been poisoned." Lani's voice squeaked. "The teapot is on the table. My fingerprints are all over it. I prepared last night's tea!"

This just kept getting better. "Call the police," I repeated. Lani's association with another murder could be explained. Delaying the call would make everything worse.

My sister's long exhale didn't bode well. "This isn't good, is it?"

Patience, I reminded myself. Three thousand miles and an ocean separated us. Going off the deep end helped no one. "No. It's not." What else could I say? Just once, I wished my impulsive twenty-year-old sister would think before she acted.

"I'll take pictures of the crime scene." With a job to do, Lani turned all business.

"No. You need to call the police, and then you need to call Mom." I wasn't going to do it. After years of being estranged, Mom and I had only recently started speaking again. No way I'd take the blame for this mess.

Real-life dead air stretched between us, broken by a sudden barking frenzy. "Oolong. Quiet. What the... Hold on. There's someone outside. No way... Cat. You've got to help me. This has to be about the treasure the professor and I found..." The phone went dead.

"Lani! Lani!" I looked at my screen. Disconnected! I redialed. The call went straight to voicemail.

Jennifer's fingers tapped on her tablet. "I'm searching for Professor Loong at the University of Hawaii."

Her unruffled let's-get-the-job-done attitude worked for me. I pinned Lani's location and dialed my mother. That call went to voicemail, too. Geez. Did anyone answer their phone anymore? I left a message.

"What important thing did the professor discover?" I air-quoted important. What could a tea specialist and my sister have found that would result in murder?

"There's no Professor Loong on the faculty at U of H on either campus," Jennifer said.

"Check for a tea sommelier on Oahu. The professor's title could be from another institution." Or even honorary.

Jennifer typed. "A Professor Loong teaches classes at a tea plantation on the North Shore near Haleiwa named Oolong Men."

"Sounds like a starting point since the professor named her dog Oolong. A plantation in Hawaii?" I thought the term referred to cotton or tobacco farms in the southeast.

"Yeah. It's a good-sized tea farm. Hawaii has several of them. Mostly on the Big Island. The climate and soil are excellent for growing the crop," Jennifer replied. "I'm booking you on the first flight to Honolulu now."

I should object. Managing a twenty-four-hour cable station required all hands on deck.

"Don't think. Just get going. I'll call 9-1-1." Jennifer gestured for me to scoot. "I've got this."

I believed her. If anyone could manage, Jennifer could. And now she had a story to report, even if Lani in trouble wasn't breaking news.

"Am I booking Russ, too?" Jennifer asked.

"He's in DC in need-to-know FBI meetings all week." The whole secrecy thing made me crazy, but the FBI was my husband's security company's largest client. Talk about bad timing. I'd have to handle my sister's latest mishap without Russ's help. "I'll call him on my way to the airport."

I cut off Jennifer's lecture by adding, "And my mother." Much as I dreaded it, there was no avoiding Mom with this one. While her military connections had helped prove Russ innocent of murder in Australia and locate a World War II code breaker for me during my Corgi adventure, I doubted my mother's ability to remain objective in this mama-bear personal situation.

"Text Mom with my flight information in case I lose cell service before I reach her." I grabbed my purse and sprinted across my office.

Jennifer's next words stopped me with one foot out the door. "Here's something interesting."

I paused in the doorway. Barkview's trivia queen's revelations tended to be noteworthy.

"Oolong Men translates as Black Dragon Gate in Mandarin."

My intuition pinged. A vivid image of a red door guarded by a scary-looking Chinese dragon came to mind. It stayed with me during the long transpacific flight. What the heck had Lani gotten me into?