

READ THE FIRST CHAPTER FROM BOOK THREE, *DEVASTATION*

The Aftermath of Pat

The news traveled with incredible speed through North Hinkapee. News of this nature didn't keep but rippled and ruffled through North Hinkapee even faster than had news of the rape of Chloe.

Everyone had a view on the events.

Some bought the story.

A (very) few thought Matt had indeed killed Pat, just because they would believe anything bad about Matt. But those parties had to admit they couldn't think of a motive.

A few thought that somehow Robert Wentworth had done it.

Still others didn't know what to think. The details were confusing and no explanation sufficed.

Judge Morrison postponed the trial for two days, to Wednesday, in order to give the family a chance to bury the young man and mourn.

The burial service was a quiet, somber affair. Virtually everyone in the town attended, escorting the pallbearers and their burden to the graveyard. Only the Wentworths, Carlins, and Jens Pickering stayed away—ostensibly to respect the dignity of the universal fate Pat Downing had suffered, no matter the circumstances of his life or death.

The Wentworths were trying not to be happy about Pat's death, because that was not what God-fearing people would do. But Faythe was having none of that pretense. "Serves the bastard right," she said out loud to her parents. Normally Lucy or Robert would have corrected her, but there was no point. And of course they were thinking the same thing anyway.

Miles had reluctantly and sadly concluded that, like it or not, Matt was all he had left as a son and an heir, and God help North Hinkapee after he himself passed away. But he must set aside that that far-off-in-the-future thought, as they still had the current situation to deal with—the trial.

Martha had reasoned it out to conclude that Matt had indeed killed Pat. Pragmatically, she realized that Matt's actions had caused her to lose one son and not two. But she felt as awful at the death of her son as Lucy had felt to lose Chloe. She wanted to have someone to blame and the Wentworths were an obvious target. But she knew it would be lying to herself to blame the Wentworths on the theory that if they hadn't caused so much trouble there wouldn't be a trial in the first place. And lying to herself wasn't ever going to be Martha's style. The death of Pat was caused only by one person and that was Matt.

Martha was hurting, and badly, but she would not let anyone see.

Earl had mixed feelings. He had kind of liked Pat, while Matt made him shudder. From a purely professional point of view he realized that the weak link in his case was now buttoned up, but it brought up with even more clarity—as if more clarity were needed—that he was just plain old on the wrong side.

Jens realized that this made Downings a more sympathetic party and his plan to attack them would not be quite as effective. He wasn't going to change his theory of the case, but recognized that this didn't help. Also, he wondered about the death of Pat being very suspicious. Clearly something was going on behind the scenes. Pat was being hidden. He didn't show up at Church, and then just before the trial he died in the sole presence of his awful brother. After thinking about it he concluded that Matt had probably killed him to shut him up.

But shut him up about what? wondered Jens. The two were on the same side. What motivation would Matt have to kill his brother?

He couldn't figure it out. *Was Pat going to confess?* he wondered. That sounded far-fetched. Or maybe Matt thought he would fall apart on cross? That was certainly more believable. He couldn't figure it out and knew there was something important going on here. He wrestled with it but the answer didn't come to him. Maybe he would learn at the upcoming hearing when he cross-examined Matt.