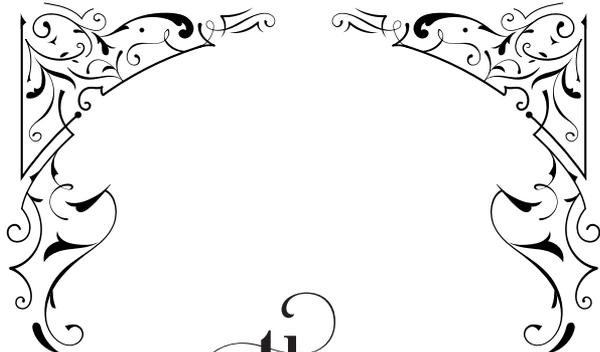


WHEN MURDER BECOMES ART

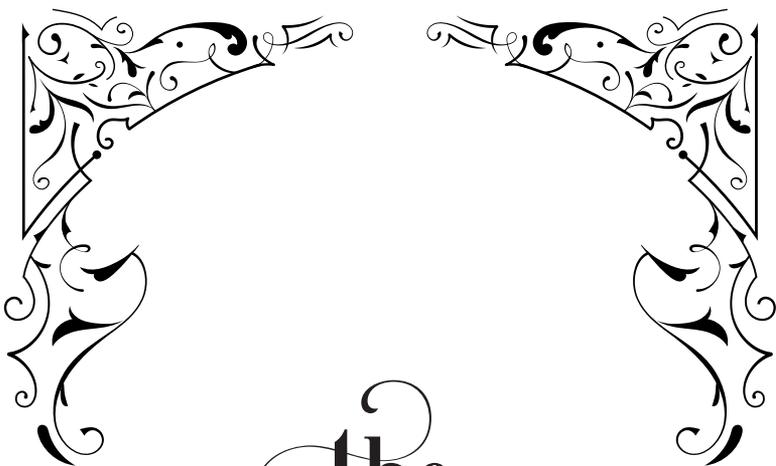
The
DOLLMAKER

Morgan Shamy



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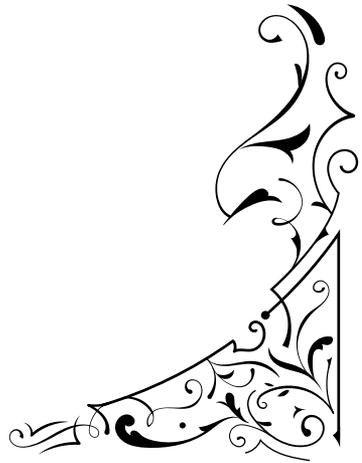
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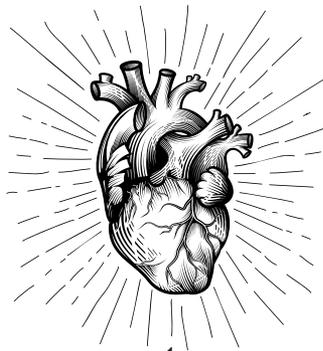
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FOR MY UNCLE DEAN,
WHO'S MADE MY LIFE PURE MAGIC.







1

Standing on Air

Newport, Rhode Island, 1920

Fingertips stretched at length, gliding through the air, smooth against the heavy beat of the music. Necks stretched long and slender, and feet pattered on the floor, pointe shoes clicking. With thinly muscled legs and tiny waists, the girls in the old studio wove in and out of each other, jumping in time with the music. Shadows shifted over their white tutus and pink silk tights, their bodies reflected in the large mirror that hung on one side of the room.

Dawn Hildegard tilted her head sideways, expelling a constricted breath. She stood off to the side, her loose gray dress drab in the room. Next to the girls, she was a goose surrounded by swans. She fiddled with the silk scarf around her neck and analyzed the girls more closely, checking for injuries.

She zeroed in on the ballerina in the center of the room with her curls pinned tightly into her golden bun. Early-morning sunlight filtered in through the tall windows in the corner, highlighting the soft bones of her face, her lashes long and dark. Color dotted the ballerina's cheeks from exertion, but she seemed to float through the room, dancing as if it were effortless. Rose Waterford was the prima in the company; no one touched her grace and extension.

Even though the other girls in the company looked unearthly with their slender frames and porcelain skin, Rose exceeded them all. The *Newport Gazette* had called her “poetry on air” after her performance in *Giselle* last season.

Dawn studied Rose more closely. She was favoring her right leg, a slight limp as she moved from position to position. Her feet must have been bothering her again.

The ballet master, Caldwell, paced at the front of the class, tapping a wooden stick, yelling at the girls to stay in time with the music. His jaw was cut strong along the sides of his face, his dark hair a curly mop on his head. His open white shirt exposed his chest, sweat running down his bare skin.

“Stop, stop.” Caldwell waved to the pianist, and the music ceased, the deep notes hanging in the air. He faced the girls head on. “A corps de ballet needs to be *one*. Like puppets on a string, you need to all move in sync. I expect perfection, and perfect is *not* what I’m getting.” A single dark brow lifted as his eyes slid to Rose. “Except for you, Miss Waterford.”

Pink flushed Rose’s cheeks, but she kept her head level. The girls around her shifted their weight, some sneaking a glance at her.

“That’s enough for now.” Caldwell motioned for the girls to leave, his New York accent coming through. He’d only been the ballet master for about a month but clearly had command over the girls. “We will resume rehearsals on stage tonight for *Coppelia*. Rose, if I could have a word?”

The room seemed to exhale at once, and the girls departed, grabbing their hand towels from the barres. They brushed past Dawn, their thin muscles flexing as they walked, their chatter drifting behind them. Dawn shifted out of the way, letting them by. She peeked at herself in the dusty mirror in front of her. She hated the way her eyes resembled two black bruises, as if she hadn’t slept in a week. Her dark hair hung in tangles over her face, where the other girls

kept their curls pinned tightly to their heads. The color of her stained dress matched her demeanor, muted against the morning light.

She wasn't surprised she was sleep deprived; being Dr. Miller's assistant was an endless job, often calling her to visit patients' homes in the dead of night. She had shown up on the Browns' doorstep just after midnight to aid in Mrs. Brown's labor—twins—one of which was a breech delivery. The blood and screams still swirled inside her head, and she shivered.

Of course she was lucky to have the position at all, as it was rare for a female to have such an apprenticeship. But the title ate through her core, sitting heavy in her stomach. It wasn't enough to be an apprentice. She wanted her *own* practice. She wanted freedom to heal, not just be the moral support. She closed her eyes for a moment, trying to breathe, before peeking out. She would get what she wanted.

Caldwell and Rose spoke quietly for a moment, Rose with her feet turned out and Caldwell with his sweaty hair hanging over his forehead. He rubbed his chest as he spoke, a small smile on his lips. Dawn overheard words like *exquisite* and *perfection*, but Rose only nodded in response, conveying thanks. Caldwell lifted up a hand and brushed her cheek, and Rose's dark lashes fluttered down, stark against her pale skin. Dawn's mouth twisted downward at the corners, her brows creasing.

Caldwell's gaze flicked to Dawn in the corner, and he lowered his hand, clearing his throat.

"I'll see you tonight, Miss Waterford."

Rose backed away as Caldwell exited the room, and as her eyes caught Dawn's, a smile lit her face.

"Dawn!" She rushed over and took her hands. "I'm so relieved you're here. I'm in so much pain." She drew Dawn over to a chair on the side of the room, planting herself down, and Dawn slung her medical pouch from her shoulder.

"Is it the feet again?" she asked.

Rose nodded, unlacing one pointe shoe. She slipped off the shoe and wiggled her stockings toes. Dawn bent down and picked up her foot, analyzing it.

“It’s swollen, that’s for certain,” she said. She pressed into the ball of her foot. “Soaking it with salts would be best. I can give you turmeric for the pain.” She dug through her pouch. “Here.” She handed Rose the herbs sealed in a small glass container.

Rose gripped the container and held it to her chest. “You’re a lifesaver. I don’t know what I’d do without you.”

“Anything for my best friend.” She smiled back, but it felt forced. Dawn took in the shadows beneath Rose’s eyes. She hadn’t noticed them earlier. Rose’s engagement was wearing on her. “Are you all right?”

Rose bit her pink lips, the color matching her cheeks. “Any day could be my last day,” she whispered. “Dancing. Performing. All of it. I don’t want to give it up, Dawn.” Moisture gathered in her eyes, but she blinked it away.

Dawn set her satchel down and took Rose’s hands. They were unusually cold. “Then don’t. You don’t have to marry Chester. Don’t let a man get in the way of what you want to do.”

Rose shook her head, tightly squeezing her eyes closed. More tears gathered in the corners.

“You know that I need the money to support my great uncle. He’s done everything for me. He raised me when no one else would take me in. I’m lucky to have an engagement at all—especially to someone with money. I would be destitute without this marriage.”

It was true. After her parents had died in the war, Rose didn’t have anything. Marrying Chester was her only hope of survival. Being in the company didn’t pay, and once young women in this town reached a certain age unmarried, they were looked down on by society. Once she was married, she’d be a sophisticated lady. She’d have to rear children. Dancing would be a thing of the past.

Dawn used to have money, until her father gambled it all away. But she didn't care about that. The poorer she was, the more men wouldn't want her. Marrying a man would destroy her chances at doing what she loved. And she would rather die a gruesome death than give up her dream of owning her own practice. She'd promised herself she'd never be tied down and forced under a man's rule.

Both Dawn and Rose were only twenty-one, yet it was ancient compared to the girls who had already come out into society. Dawn had been a debutante six months earlier and still hadn't secured herself a husband, much to her mother's dismay.

"Things are going to be fine," Dawn said. "I'll make sure of it." Rose lifted her eyes, her perfect lips pouting. Dawn gave Rose a tight hug and pulled back. She opened her mouth to say something about Caldwell stroking her cheek, but he'd done it numerous times before. Maybe it didn't bother Rose. It was normal for a director to get close to his dancers, wasn't it?

Dawn stood and dusted off her knee-length skirt. "I should get going. Dr. Miller wants me to remove a splinter that Johnny Wilson caught in his hand. I need to get it out before it becomes infected."

"You really should be doing more than removing splinters," Rose said, wiping the tears from her cheeks. "You're much more talented than that."

"Tell that to Dr. Miller." She couldn't hide the disdain in her voice. "Besides, I don't have a choice." *Not right now anyway.* The work that Dr. Miller did was "a man's job," where she was only allowed to do work suited to "a woman." Which apparently included delivering babies and removing splinters.

It was as if her schooling had been a complete waste. She'd been lucky enough to procure a position at the University of Geneva for her residency. Dr. Miller had connections, even though she'd been only seventeen at the time. She owed everything to him. Without him, she'd never have the chance to live her dream. She'd been the

only female student in her program, but had excelled quickly, completing her training in record time. Not that it mattered. Training or no, she was still viewed inferior in the eyes of the public.

Dawn sighed and swung her satchel over her shoulder. Thoughts of starting her own practice came to her mind again. Maybe she could do this sooner rather than later. She knew she would have future patients, as the dancers here at this school preferred a female doctor. But she couldn't afford it. And her parents would never allow it while she was under their roof. She'd have to figure out another way.

She gave Rose one last smile before leaving.

Fresh air hit her nose as she left the rehearsal hall and stepped into the theater's courtyard. Brick walkways cut through green grass on a long expanse of lawn, large oak trees interspersed through the area, black lampposts lining the walkways. Red, yellow, and orange leaves splashed through the area like a child's finger painting, brightening the muted light from above. Thin clouds stretched over the sky, moving fast behind the towering theater.

Dawn peeked up at the ominous structure with its Victorian spires shooting into the sky. Statues of twisted creatures adorned the exterior, along with intricate carvings that lined the stone walls. It seemed to bend and warp above her, growing in size until she blinked and looked away. She had never been to the ballet, and the thought of seeing Rose onstage made her chest ache with longing. But because Rose's wedding was next week, she might not get a chance.

Dawn quickly headed down the pathways, making her way across the courtyard. She kept her medical pouch close to her side, her loose dress swishing, her canvas shoes quiet on the walk. Several people were gathered underneath the trees, conversing. Ladies in low-waisted dresses and cloche hats batted their eyes at men in silk shirts with handkerchiefs and fedoras.

Johnny Wilson was probably furious she wasn't there yet. He was a butcher right in town, who treated people worse than the animals he slaughtered. She had tended to a wound of his last year—a knife accident—and when she refused to give him opium, he slapped her across the face. She believed in herbs over opiates, as the stronger drugs were addictive.

A breeze skidded across her shoulders, and she tucked her scarf closer around her neck. Her feet crunched on the fall leaves, the cool air clearing her head. She was continuing across the lawn, toward the wrought-iron gates that surrounded the courtyard, when Chester appeared in front of her.

She stopped in her tracks, digging her heels into the grassy lawn.

"There you are," he said. A smile crooked his young face, and he leaned against a tree trunk, arms crossed. "I knew you would emerge at some point." His pin-striped suit was tailored perfectly against his lean frame, his shoes shiny.

She bit down hard on her lip, forcing her gaze away. Dawn wanted nothing to do with Rose's betrothed. Yes, Rose needed the marriage to survive, but he was the perpetrator. He was a dirty cheat. She marched past him, keeping her eyes straight forward.

"Whoa, wait up." He pushed off the tree and fell into step beside her.

She kept walking. "Hello, Chester. Meet any new girls lately? How's your love life?"

An image of Chester stepping outside a brothel flashed to her mind. She'd been walking home after visiting Mrs. Smith's fevering baby, when Chester had staggered outside, shirt open, two scantily clad women on his arms. He'd clearly been drunk—slurred speech and mussed hair. The women's hands had been all over him. Rose would be devastated if she knew.

"That's what I wanted to speak with you about," Chester said, rushing to keep up with her.

“There’s nothing to talk about.” She’d already decided she couldn’t tell Rose. As much as she supported Rose’s dancing, and she didn’t want her to give up her dream, she couldn’t watch her become destitute. She needed to be taken care of. If Rose knew about Chester’s lies, she would refuse to marry him and then her whole future would be ruined. She’d lose the opportunity to take care of herself and her great uncle.

Chester scratched the back of his head, his fingers running through his sandy hair. Deep dimples popped out of his cheeks.

“I really like her,” he answered. “Might even love her.”

“You sure have a funny way of showing it.”

“Dawn.” Chester grabbed her arm and drew her to a stop. She glared at him, her mouth glued into a straight line. “Our engagement party is in two days,” he said. “I don’t want anything to ruin it. Can I trust you with this?”

She stared back at him, taking in his expectant face. The face of a liar. The face of a cheat. It was common for men to have affairs with a variety of women, but this was Rose.

Sweet, innocent Rose.

“I already told you, I’m not going to say anything. You know as well as I do that Rose needs this.”

Chester visibly relaxed. “Thank you.” He paused for a moment, his dimples popping out in his cheeks again, before he said, “How are you? I know it’s the anniversary of your brother’s—”

“I’m *fine*. Good day, Chester.” Although their families used to run in the same circles, that didn’t mean he was her friend. And she didn’t want to think about her brother now.

She started away when a yell echoed down from the courtyard. More shouts erupted, and Dawn glanced back over her shoulder, her brows pushed together. A loud creak sounded on the air, and her eyes widened.

“Look out!” Dawn shouted.

A large tree limb broke off from one of the massive oaks in the courtyard, crashing straight down onto a man who was standing underneath the tree. The branch nearly missed the woman next to him, and she clasped her gloved hands over her mouth before she screamed.

Dawn's heart took off, and she sprinted forward with Chester by her side. Men and women had gathered around the scene, and the man underneath the large branch was writhing in pain, though he kept a surprisingly cool face.

The large limb was as thick as a man, and at least a couple hundred pounds. It was clearly too heavy to move off by himself, and a circle of men rushed forward, including Chester, who removed his coat and rolled up his sleeves. On the count of three, the men hefted the branch off of the man; all the while the woman next to him continued to scream.

"My Frederick! He's as good as dead! I can't believe I'm to become a widow. We've only been married a week."

Frederick rolled his eyes at his wife's cries. "I'll be quite all right, dear, just let these men help me and quit your whimpering." The color had drained from his face.

The men were able to roll the limb off of Frederick, but he lay panting hard, wincing.

"Doctor! We need a doctor," his wife cried.

It was as if a jolt went through Dawn, electrocuting her straight to her middle. She pushed her way forward, shoving a couple men out of the way before kneeling in front of Frederick.

"I'm a doctor," she breathed. "I'm here to help you."

Looks were exchanged around her, but Dawn didn't pay them any mind. The town was small enough that she knew the usual faces the odd looks belonged to.

Frederick's lips were tucked inward, cringing through the pain. "Aren't you a little young to be a doctor?"

Her lips lifted up wryly. “I thought you’d oppose the fact that I’m a woman.” She scanned his body.

“As long as you can heal me, I don’t care what you are.” He hissed as Dawn touched his side.

She lifted up his shirt and felt along his torso and stomach, pressing into his soft flesh, before she analyzed his shoulder. His wife had finally stopped screaming, but she was staring down at Dawn like she had grown a second head.

“You have broken ribs and a dislocated shoulder,” Dawn said. “I’m going to have to pop the shoulder back in, but I’m going to need you to sit up. Do you think you can do that? It’ll hurt.”

Frederick’s mouth turned down, but he gave a slight nod. More sweat shimmered on his brow. “A little help?”

Chester jumped in to help, and guided Frederick upward, keeping him straight with his arms.

Dawn squared Frederick’s shoulders and gently took his injured arm, straightening it out before him. She positioned it at the right angle, and Frederick cried out in pain. Dawn was used to the cries of human suffering, as she’d learned to not let them affect her. She zoned in on the task before her, seeing nothing but flesh, blood, and bone. Frederick was a specimen, nothing more, an object needing to be healed. If she let herself think of him as a person—as a man with hopes and dreams, a man with a family—she wouldn’t be able to focus. The world blurred in her vision, Frederick crisp and clear before her.

Without warning, she shoved the arm up and in, and the expected “pop” sounded. Frederick curled over, whimpering.

“I feel like such a weakling,” he finally said. “But it’s . . . feeling better.”

“It’ll feel worse tomorrow.” She zeroed in on Frederick’s pale face. “We need to get you to Dr. Miller’s clinic. Fixing a dislocated shoulder was the least of your worries. We need to bind up your ribs,

and . . . by the look of discoloration on your abdomen, you could be bleeding internally.”

Frederick paled further.

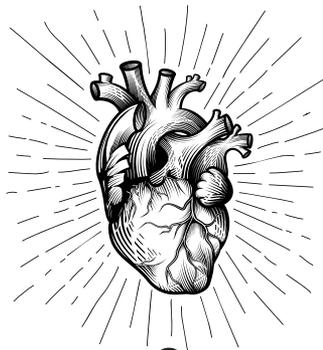
“No!” His wife stepped in. Her blonde ringlets bounced. “Absolutely not. We’ll take you to a *real* doctor, Freddy.” She shoved Chester aside and helped Frederick to his feet. He hissed, limping on one foot. “If anything’s wrong, it’s because *she* touched you.” She threw Dawn a dirty look. “Come on.”

The crowd departed, more people giving Dawn strange looks, until she and Chester were alone. A light breeze drifted in, chilling Dawn’s skin. Chester stared out in front of him, mouth pressed downward.

“You saved his life,” Chester said quietly.

She shook her head. “No, he’s a dead man walking.”

And he was. Without proper medical care, he wouldn’t last a day.



2

Black Tide

Dawn unwrapped her scarf from her neck as she stepped inside the main entryway of her home. She ran her hands along the silky material, her fingers lingering at the bottom. The white satin was as pale as her skin, and she marveled at the stitching that swirled along the edges of the material. It was the nicest thing she owned. It made her feel as if she could stroll in Brenton Park with a gentleman on her arm.

Not that she wanted a gentleman on her arm.

She paused in the small entryway, taking in the dusty chandelier that hung above her, tarnished to a greenish brown. Ripped carpet ran up the stairs to the few rooms that sat there, including her own tiny bedroom, adjacent to her brother's old room. A parlor was over to her left—peeling paint on the door frame. Rustling came from the back kitchen, where Mrs. Cook was probably bustling around.

They didn't have the luxury of employing a butler, valets, maids, or a chef, but Mrs. Cook did what she could around the house for the small penny she was given. She'd only been employed with the Hildegards for about a month, but already she felt more like a mother to Dawn than her own.

She'd been the one who had stitched Dawn's scarf, as a welcoming gift.

She again admired the fine material.

"Mrs. Cook, is that you?" Dawn called out. "I'm home!"

Dawn brushed her skirt and headed down the narrow hallway to the back kitchen, her footsteps clicking on the hardwood floors. When she pushed the door open, Mrs. Cook had her back turned to her, bent over, removing a pan of tea cakes from the oven. Warm spice hit her nose, and Dawn inhaled, letting the smell settle into her chest. She could live in this kitchen.

Mrs. Cook spun around and nearly dropped the pan. She abruptly set it on the table, removing her hot gloves. Her hand flew to her chest.

"Child, you scared me." The wrinkles around her mouth deepened as her eyes narrowed. A red rash spread across her cheeks, and Dawn eyed the small bumps.

"If you used a cold compress and chamomile oil it would help with the rash," she said. "I think I have some on me." She dug into her pouch, but Mrs. Cook motioned her down.

"No, child. Sit. I'm perfectly fine. Just the sun. Madam has me working in the garden lately."

Dawn tightened her lips but plopped herself down at the table. She snatched a bite of tea cake from the pan and closed her eyes, chewing, nearly moaning from how hungry she was. She couldn't remember the last time she'd eaten. Probably twenty-four hours ago.

Mrs. Cook crossed her arms over her large chest and clicked her tongue. "You know, I was a nurse in the war and even the soldiers didn't look as haggard as you. That doctor has you running ragged."

Dawn sighed, snatching another bite of warm cake. "I'm fine," she mumbled, relishing the flavor on her tongue. "I just need to eat the rest of these tea cakes and I'll be good to go."

Mrs. Cook huffed. “I don’t like you being out and about. You know it’s not safe right now.” She eyed the newspaper on the table and scooted it over to Dawn.

Silence stretched as Dawn peered at the headline.

THE DOLLMAKER STRIKES AGAIN.

Dawn stopped chewing, her mouth parting slightly.

“He’s back?”

Mrs. Cook nodded.

Dawn swallowed hard, the cake sticking in her throat.

Everyone was talking about the Dollmaker.

He was a serial killer—a man who killed young girls and hacked off their limbs, only to sew their different body parts back together. It was said each “masterpiece” he created was made up of at least eight different women. These creations were found suspended in different positions throughout the States, their eyes blank and bodies dressed as if they were beautiful dolls. It was like *Frankenstein*—Dawn had loved that book as a child, but the thought of a man taking different body parts and sewing them together made her blood curdle.

“It’s not safe for any young woman to be out.”

Dawn shivered but shook her head. “As if the Dollmaker would come here to Newport.”

“He’s traveling,” Mrs. Cook said. She pointed at the paper. “He started in New York and he’s traveling north. There have been three murders since his last masterpiece.”

Masterpiece.

She hated to admit it, but a sick part of her was fascinated. From what she’d heard, the man’s amputations were an art. Clean and clear cut, done with perfect precision. Dawn was already fascinated with the human body as is, and his skill only intrigued her further.

Footsteps pounded down the hall, and the kitchen door swung open. Dawn’s mother barged into the room, a slender finger pointed in front of Mrs. Cook’s face.

“I have a guest!” she said. “*What* is taking so long? How difficult is it to provide nourishment to our guest? Are you completely useless?”

Mrs. Cook stilled, and a lump bobbed in her chubby throat. “Coming right away, madam.” Her eyes darted toward Dawn before her gaze shot back up to her mother.

Dorothy Hildegard was the epitome of fashion—or at least she tried to be. A burgundy scarf was wrapped around her bobbed hair, the same brocade necklace she always wore strung around her neck. It was the only piece of jewelry she owned that spoke of money. She’d sold most of her possessions after Dawn’s father had bankrupted them. She wore a handkerchief dress and a fur shawl, with gloves that stopped at her wrists.

She lived in a pretend world, acting as if they had piles of money sitting in the next room.

Her mother’s gaze slowly slid to Dawn, and they lit up. “There you are. Get up. You have a guest!” She gave her the same smile she did whenever she had a potential suitor for Dawn.

Mrs. Cook hustled backward and began placing the little cakes on a platter.

Dawn sprang up from her chair. *Not another one.* “A guest? Who?”

Her mother crossed her arms, and her mouth pulled up into what Dawn knew was her version of a smile. “Arthur Hemsworth. He’s quite excited to meet you. Now get up.”

“Arthur *Hemsworth*? That dirty old man?” The Hemsworth name was the wealthiest in town. She knew there were several Hemsworths, but she had met only Arthur. “I can’t be here!” She scrambled around as if searching for her coat. “I need to leave.”

Dorothy marched over and gripped Dawn roughly around the wrist, yanking her toward the door. “I should have you change, but your appearance will have to do.”

Dawn tried to wriggle out of her hold. “Stop.” She struggled further. “You’re right, I shouldn’t be seen right now. I’m not put together.”

Dorothy pushed open the parlor door and shoved Dawn forward. She stumbled, catching herself on the sofa. Her fingers gripped the tufted leather, and her eyes immediately connected with Arthur Hemsworth’s.

An old man, probably in his seventies, sat on the edge of his seat with his cane planted in front of him. Wrinkles folded over his face as he frowned, gray wisps of hair swooped back over his balding, pockmarked forehead and scalp. A finely tailored suit lined his impossibly skinny frame, and his knuckles stood out where he gripped the cane, large veins in his hands.

Dorothy nudged her in the side and mumbled, “Curtsy, smile, do something.”

Dawn shifted away, throwing her a glare. Her gaze settled back on the old man. “Mr. Hemsworth.”

Arthur’s dry lips pulled up into a smile. His eyes sparkled as he looked her over, his gaze stopping on her bosom. “I look forward to our future time together.”

Dawn stiffened, before subtly leaning into her mother. “*What* is he talking about?” she asked out of the side of her mouth.

“Mr. Hemsworth has agreed to marry you,” her mother said, chin lifted. “It’ll be a small ceremony next week.” She lowered her voice and whispered, “Don’t mess this up. You came out into society *six* months ago and you still haven’t snatched a husband. This is your last shot. And Arthur Hemsworth is *very* rich.” She straightened and gave Arthur a smile.

Arthur’s gaze continued to roam over Dawn’s body with a hungry look, and Dawn placed her hands on her abdomen, trying to breathe. Everything she had ever hoped for tumbled down in her mind like a landslide. Her practice. Her dream of being a doctor.

Owning her own clinic. It was all going to be taken away in an instant—by this old, dirty man.

“No,” she said outright, voice trembling. “I won’t. I’m sorry.”

Arthur’s face faltered, and his heavy-lidded eyes narrowed. Dawn knew she was acting like a child, but she didn’t care. She’d stomp her foot and cry if she had to. Nothing could make her marry him. She wasn’t sure how she had the ability to move, but she strode past the old man and swept out of the room, exiting to the front entryway. Shaking, she threw open the front door. Her mother shouted after her, but she stormed forward until something made her stop dead in her tracks.

A man stood before her, his hand raised like he was about to knock, a long black coat gliding along his lean frame. Dark eyes peered down at her, the shaded light from the trees deepening his defined bones. He had pockets for cheeks and sleek black hair that was combed smoothly against his head. He fixed his face into a glare.

“Is this the Hildegard residence?” he said curtly.

Dawn faltered back, blinking. She peeked behind her to the door, then faced him again.

“Who are you?”

His lips pressed tightly together. “I asked if this was the Hildegard residence.”

She swiped a hand through her tangled hair while staring him down. She’d had a long day. First, waking up groggy from lack of sleep; second, the spectacle in the courtyard, and then finding out her life was being planned out for her. She didn’t like this man’s directness, and she wasn’t about to let him make her day any worse.

“Is there something I can help you with Mr.—?”

The man puffed up his chest before exhaling. “I am Gideon Hemsworth. I was told my uncle was here.”

Dawn’s brows shot up to her forehead. “Arthur Hemsworth is your uncle?”

“Great uncle, yes.”

She swallowed down her surprise. She didn’t know why he was here, but it couldn’t be good. Anyone related to that disgusting man was bad news.

“Here to celebrate his engagement?” she said. “I hear some poor girl is being roped into marrying him.”

“More like the other way around,” he said darkly. “Now, will you show me to my uncle? You look like you work here, that you know your way around.”

“Like I work . . .?” She peeked down at her loose gray dress before peering back up at him. She held in a smile. “You’re right. I *do* know my way around here, and I can assure you that the residents of this house *don’t* want you here.”

Gideon kept his weight planted into the ground, and his severe eyes attacked her once more. “It appears that I’ll need to make sure the residents of this house know how their *help* is speaking to me.” His lips flattened. “Though I don’t know how they can afford you.”

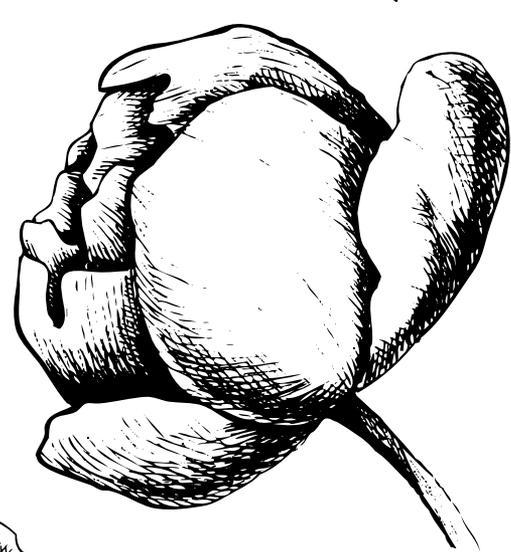
He looked over the Hildegards’ small stone apartment jammed between identical adjacent homes.

“If you’ll excuse me.” He brushed past Dawn and let himself into the house without another word. She stared after where he’d disappeared, her brows pressed firmly together. The nerve of that man. Assuming she was the *help*? Just because she didn’t dress like . . . like Rose.

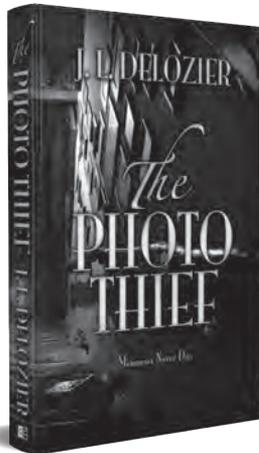
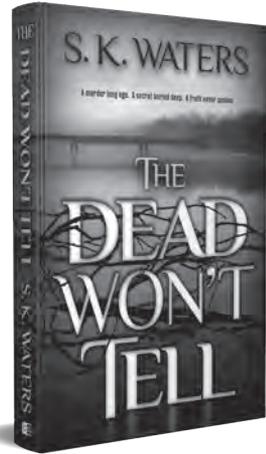
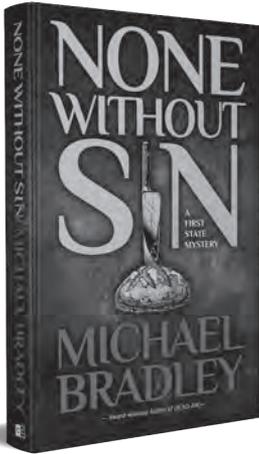
Gideon Hemsworth.

The name stuck in her throat. She couldn’t get the image of his face out of her mind. She had never met someone so distinctive-looking before. She was used to conversing with many different people in her line of work, and they all blended together in a sea of ordinary faces. But Gideon Hemsworth . . .

She shook her head. He was Arthur Hemsworth’s grandnephew. He was the enemy.

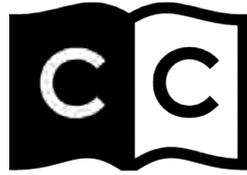


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When Dawn Hildegard's best friend Rose is kidnapped by "The Dollmaker," a crazed serial killer who creates "art" from women's bodies, she drops everything to find her—including her dream of becoming a doctor. With the help of a handsome new acquaintance and his mysterious brother, they set off to find the killer. Although they quickly become friends, Dawn cannot shake the uneasy feeling that the brothers know more about the murders than they admit.

As more and more victims are found murdered and displayed throughout town, Dawn must use her wits to find Rose before it's too late. And before she too becomes the Dollmaker's next victim.

*Thick stitches lined the neck and where the
arms and legs and joints connected.
Different arms . . . different legs . . . different hands...*



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