The Significance of Historical Crime Fiction in Tracking Culture: A Study and Composure of a Novel within the Genre

by

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ABSTRACT

Mystery writing is a genre that has evolved substantially since its inception, inviting intrigue, exploration, and conversation. Within the countless subsections that have emerged as a result of new voices and perspectives are thousands of texts that effectively portray societal evolution. A leader in this objective is historical crime fiction, a genre that involves significant research to rebuild an era that has passed in synchrony with a realistic narrative, interwoven with mystery. The extensive time and effort placed into crafting these stories should afford them stronger recognition in academia as informational sources. This thesis involves two methods that indicate the merits of the historical crime fiction genre. The first is a synopsis, which summarizes the evolution of crime in both society and fiction, and how various genres related to mystery have transformed, each providing unique insights into society's opinions regarding such monstrosity. The second is the partial construction of an independent creative novel situated in 1840's London, along with a full story outline, to insert my own voice into the collective genre while proving that significant research is necessary within the ensuing annotated bibliography. As I continue writing my novel, I will conduct ongoing research to eliminate any anachronism, further demonstrating the constant effort mandated to add to the genre. Utilizing the voices and stories within historical crime fiction can be a valuable asset to researchers and society alike as a method of learning about culture, and they should be appropriately prioritized.

HISTORICAL CRIME SYNOPSIS

The power to determine what a text will be utilized for lies both in the hands of the author and in those of the audience. Whether readers choose to pick up a novel for academia, research, pleasure, or out of unbridled curiosity will adjust their perceptions of the work as a whole. The range of these uses varies in many other ways, most significantly due to the genre that the text has been categorized in. Romance novels may be purchased by avid dreamers and those interested in human connection, while textbooks can be used for exploration and extensive learning. Writing in any genre demands an intimate knowledge of cultural processes, societal standards, and various other details that supply context for the text. The historical fiction genre is unique as it requires authors to carefully craft a realistic image of a world during a culturally recognizable time. Added to this composed setting is a fictional plot that the author must ensure is logical and understandable in this unfamiliar climate. Further complicating this concept is the historical crime fiction novel, which serves as an amalgam of two literary genres: historical fiction and mystery fiction. Whereas historical fiction involves intimate knowledge of the past, the addition of crime fiction includes the horrors, now imagined by thousands of authors, that had the potential to occur in such circumstances. Witnessing the ability of each author to recreate history, supplemented by mystery, makes this subgenre a fascinating study of culture and academia, and proves the significance of writing historically accurate stories to be later used as referrals for future generations. The work composed within the historical crime fiction genre can be utilized to study how novels reflect the evolution of society,

dominant ideas, and events within every era of the past, while proving that fiction books are a valuable asset to track and represent cultural changes and shifts across different generations.

The Origin of Crime Exploration

The public's curiosity for crime did not solely originate in mystery novels, but rather from their lived experiences and interactions with death, often supplemented by instantaneous reporting. When a crime occurred locally, those in the area developed many expectations—principally the ability to experience things in their own terms—which could include gaining information by print, exploring the scene, or attending funerals for the victims, no matter how far they might need to travel. Sightseeing at the location of the crime was a popular pastime in the nineteenth century, where the living could traipse through active scenes of murder, disturbing the gore, objects, and even bodies, which were often left behind to enhance viewing pleasure (Flanders 3). Purchasing tangible memories to represent these events in the 1850s involved broadsides, or a single printed sheet of paper which came out in sequential order as a crime developed, including: "the first report of the crime, with further details as they were revealed; the magistrates' court hearing after an arrest; then the trial; and finally, and most profitably, a 'sorrowful lamentation' and 'last confession,' usually combined with a description of the execution" (Flanders 4). A deviation of the broadside, available to those with more money to spend, were pamphlets, which contained details on the inquest and could span across eight pages (Flanders 5). It was not until the late

nineteenth century when newspapers, plays, and other forms of short fiction entered the public sphere as methods for learning about crime, whether real or fictionalized.

Further Adaptations of Murder

Compared to broadsides, which ran cheaply, newspapers were considered an expensive form for satiating one's crime-related curiosity. However, as reporters began to work for their wage, and earned the right to both share their opinion on, and attend, various trials, this longer form of printing began to gain traction. Prosperous, middle-class readers were especially intrigued by crime, and could afford richer text, prompting those in print to capitalize on the opportunity (Flanders 27). In various cases, updating the public on the complicated terms of deaths and upcoming trials involved particular effort on the part of newspapers where, on any day during the month that the initial murder occurred in, print "consisted of two pages of advertisements, two columns of news, a few letters, some birth and death announcements; and the rest of the paper was entirely given over to police, trial and magistrates' court reports" (Flanders 27). This complete devotion of editorial space to crime as it occurred hinted at the interest in the public in murderous material, regardless of the source.

Not all adaptations of murder were completely truthful, however. Aside from the tendency of the papers to exaggerate details for entertainment, some constructed content with intentions of it being fictitious, such as plays and penny-bloods, developed out of gothic tales. These productions might have created characters and

plots of deception and drama, but they did not stray too far from what was comfortable and familiar, as “the subjects tended to be those audiences could identify with,” including the working men with evil masters and villains represented as authority figures, whereas heroines wore white and dressed as sailors, while their evil counterparts “wore the guise of men about town” (Flanders 32).

Penny-bloods, or penny-dreadfuls as they were renamed in the 1860s, introduced the short story which revolved around mystery and crime, allowing even those without the funds for newspapers to enjoy cheap fiction. Original penny-bloods, with the very first dating to 1836, focused on highwaymen and evil aristocrats, whereas later versions involved “the remorseless policeman hunting down criminals” and the vast work of detectives (Flanders 60). However, while the penny-blood appeared to unite the public in its representation of society, class differences persisted, with it assumed that “different audiences would take different messages from the entertainment, depending on their class background” (Flanders 115). By studying the forms of such fiction that circulated during this era, it can be determined that even they portrayed the massive divide existing between those working and those worked for, yet “the main element in melodrama was the black-and-white nature of the characters: good was good, evil was evil” (Flanders 156). Despite the existing contrast and clear desire for distinction between classes, authors of penny-bloods constructed worlds in which everyone viewed crime in the same way.

Early Crime Publications

It is these elements of fiction, as well as their cultural context, that provide the richest representation of society during early eras of crime publication. Evolving slowly from the penny-bloods were stories centered around mystery, which became popular with Edgar Allan Poe's work in 1841, titled *Murders in the Rue Morgue*. While Poe was not aware of the "detective" at his initial time of writing, this story, and his impressive investigator, C. Auguste Dupin, established "the convention by which the brilliant intelligence of the detective is made to shine more brightly through the comparative obtuseness of his friend who tells the story," making a fixed pattern for most detective stories for nearly a century (Symons 43). Poe's storytelling abilities paved the way for thousands of writers, and a collective study of the work that appeared in this era proves that "the pattern of the detective story as it formed in the eighteen-fifties and sixties was closely related to the rise in Britain and America of a middle class with increasing leisure, the spread of reading, and the development of detective forces in several countries" (Symons 51). Rather than purchasing penny-bloods to obtain a quick summary of realistic facts, readers were invested in long-form, intriguing texts, created by authors who reflected society's changing views of the police force and adaptation to the merits of private investigative work. Other prominent voices, such as Wilkie Collins and Émile Gaboriau, further developed Poe's initial representations into the standard for the professional detective, "whether uniformed or in plain clothes," who "no longer appears in fiction as the corrupt oppressor, but as the protector of the innocent" (Symons 67). *The Moonstone*, a

famous publication of Collins in 1868 and widely considered the first English detective novel, was "a pioneering blend of sensation and realism" which introduced the "terrors of the cheerful country house, or the busy London lodgings," and proves a significant shift in representations of mystery—rather than hiding in fantastical settings, authors were now willing to develop crime in their own backyards (Edwards 42).

Crime literature published from 1890 and onwards offered "a reassuring world in which those who tried to disturb the established order were always discovered and punished," having been caught by an angelic and highly intellectually proficient detective, inspired by Poe, who acted as society's agent and protector (Symons 24). As within plays and penny-bloods, readers reacted best to the stories where they could find versions of themselves, and seeing an honest character posed against cruel figures they might have encountered in their own working lives was comforting. The combination of these new settings and characters generated other authors, including Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who introduced the world to Sherlock Holmes. In Doyle's writing, "ideas were fresh and his observations on human behaviour insightful" (Edwards 64). Doyle was unafraid of creating complicated and dense characters who were evil solely because they wanted to be, and his villains, modelled on real-life criminals, proves to researchers that maniacal people existed and had a profound impact on past societies (Edwards 66). Even more dangerous was the newly created archetype of the master-criminal which Holmes faced, "now a gentleman; he was not only educated, he was cleverer than anyone around him" (Flanders 293). With the

introduction of intricate characters and brilliant detectives, it is thus no surprise that interest shifted into the actual work conducted by the detective.

Mystery Genres

Mystery fiction has evolved with dozens of different eras and societal connotations, beginning with Ancient and Medieval, followed by Early Detective fiction, the Golden Age, the Post-Golden Age, Modern Detective fiction, and now Contemporary mystery. Each genre is influx with thousands of creative texts, and all significantly represent their time period's culture and beliefs.

As discussed, Early Detective fiction, representing the voices of pioneers such as Poe, Collins, Gaboriau, Doyle, Dickens, and others, established the shift from brief penny-bloods to more convoluted plots and characters. Sensation fiction, introduced by Collins with *The Woman in White*, "situated the stores squarely in the middle-class home, which was now seen to be a den of infamy, filled with madness, forgery, bigamy and murder" (Flanders 289). Collins used real crimes in his fiction but fantasized other elements, turning the genre into a startling picture of enhanced realism.

The Golden Age, which began in the 1920s, put forth established community values and created a detective story world where "decent men played games and were not too highly intellectual, women slept only with their husbands and never drank too much, and servants knew their place— which was in the servants' hall" (Symons 23). Driven by strict societal expectations that were shaped by war, the picture of the

mystery changed into one that included "nothing even faintly disturbing about the fate of victims or murderers" (Symons 148). For everyone, "the war brought pain and grief," which impacted characters and writers alike, and urged methods of distraction (Edwards 134). Unemployment and a wide mood for euphoria caused a desperation for fun, and "detective puzzles, like crossword puzzles, offered an enjoyable way of escaping from personal problems by solving someone else's" (Edwards 153). Agatha Christie, a pioneer of the Golden Age, adjusted stories in this era to create those which "came to be regarded as a puzzle pure and complex, and interest in the fates of its characters was increasingly felt to be not only unnecessary but also undesirable" (Symons 113). Dorothy L. Sayers, Mary Roberts Rinehart, and thousands of others composed in this era where "social values demanded the solution of problems by a detective, either amateur or professional," who was motivated by the community's shared moral standards (Symons 178). These stories, so closely molded by cultural contexts, can be utilized to uncover the true beliefs of post-war society. While they still involved crime, the Golden Age prioritized honest policemen who cooperated with their subjects, detectives that avoided violence and prioritized reason, clean puzzles, and good taste.

The same cannot be said for Modern Detective Fiction, which appeared in the 1940s through pulp magazines, as the "blue-collar workers' version of the crime story" which involved the hard-boiled dick who "moved instinctively, was as fallible as the next man, and put faith in his gun" (Symons 154). Perceptions of the human mind had shifted since the Golden Age following the Second World War, where "after

the death camps and the torture, after so many ordinary people had carried out so many monstrous crimes, elegant and rational explanations for evil acts no longer seemed enough," demonstrating the impact that current events on fiction (Edwards 377). Rather than favoring soft-rooted writing, readers now desired hardcore crimes, clever detectives, and villains who existed in corrupt societies. Pioneers of this era include hardcore authors such as Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler, who produced the archetypal figures of the forever prominent Sam Spade and Philip Marlowe "out of the American air, and fed them into the public consciousness through literature" (Symons 188). Such detectives didn't "want to be an erudite solver of riddles in the Sherlock Holmes manner; he wants to be a hard and shifty fellow, able to take care of himself in any situation" (Edwards 227). With these intense characters, it was necessary that the works focused on "the corruption and abuse of power" that many believed existed within the police force, where raw dialogue, alcohol, and pure violence characterize such brutal tales (Edwards 226). Chandler's work argued for "realism in the genre and credibility of motivation," with "a little touch of something out of the ordinary" (Edwards 276). Passion for these hard-boiled crime stories grew with the American revolution, which made the stories respectable, and "recognized as new, remarkable, and American" (Edwards 277). Such pioneers of the genre, who completely concealed the softness of the Golden Age, thus paved the way for the current Contemporary mystery.

Whereas the police force in hard-boiled fiction portrayed cops as "stupid, thuggish, or corrupt," authors in the contemporary era often present them as "ordinary

people doing their best in a difficult job" (Edwards 594). This is the genre that has developed into the most subsections, including whodunits, cozy mysteries, psychological thrillers, forensic mystery, historical fiction, and many more. Particularly, "psychological suspense continues to attract writers capable of using the crime novel as a tool of recognition, a means of solving the puzzles of human nature, of understanding who we are" (Edwards 588). Modern mysteries, far evolved from the penny-bloods of the nineteenth century, combine all elements of past eras of writing: readers want to learn about the crime, the criminal, and the victim, in stories that cover societal issues and expansive themes, while not losing the gore, intrigue, and suspense that everyone knows best.

Any mystery story, regardless of the fantastical elements of the crime or methods of solving it, will reflect society in some way. Especially detective stories, which involve villains that are motivated in their cruelty for a variety of reasons, can "be a vehicle for exploring and exposing the condition of society, and for saying something true about human nature," as well as a way of exposing the perspectives that the author themselves holds (Edwards 609).

Historical Crime Fiction

While every novel composed across genres represents a method for witnessing how society existed at an exact time, historical fiction takes a deeper step. The most notable early installment of the genre came with Melville Davisson Post in 1911, set in the years before the American Civil War, and has since adopted other authors

including Agatha Christie, John Dickinson Carr, and Josephine Tey, who produced the most widely acclaimed history-mystery of the 1950s (Edwards 605). Writing historical crime fiction allows authors to explore their time periods of interest, while supplementing readers with sufficient details of how certain religious sects operated, how society acted, various philosophies, what people wore and ate, professional and personal expectations, and more. However, presenting these former circumstances does not come without its challenges. Without the avenues of "genetic fingerprinting, mobile-phone tracking, surveillance of social media, internet search engines," or CCTV, authors must "conjure up workarounds" to evade such cliches and clues that technologies can afford in fiction (Edwards 608). Alternatively, facing a lack of modern-day methods affords authors the chance to subvert the expected, drawing their readers in close with niche crimes and methods of reporting. Most important about historical crime fiction is the fact that these "history-mysteries offer readers entertaining education," as they "invariably betray and portray the time they were written in as much as or more than they accurately present the time in which they are set" (Edwards 610). It is the use of these stories as historical evidence that should be highlighted more strongly in the literary world, as they are methods for learning that can be akin to, and just as valuable as, textbooks.

Tracking Culture

When thinking of conducting historical research, most are quick to source a textbook, which has been painted as the principal text necessary for learning about the

past. However, many of the methods used to build a historical crime fiction text are the same—extensive digging must be conducted in order to accurately portray not only a time that has passed, but to build a new narrative within it. This resource, as an "in-depth portrayal of historical detectives," ultimately "broadens our understanding of past lives" (Edwards 610). Although the world in which the characters exist in is long gone, authors in this genre possess the skill of bringing it back to life in a realistic and entertaining way. Therefore, the merits of using these texts as qualified academic resources should be argued more persistently.

The niche details explored in historical crime fiction further prove the cultural lessons that can be explored as a result of having such texts. In *A Grave Robbery* by Deanna Raybourn, which takes place in London, 1889, a historian and lepidopterist investigate the villainy behind a woman's perfectly preserved dead body. The historical context covers familiar subjects, such as the dress of the main characters, involving narrow trousers, shirtwaists, fitted jackets, flat boots, and corsets, as well as methods of travel, being hansom cabs and horseback, and the menial employment within domestic service undertaken by children, such as "hauling and scrubbing, cleaning, cooking, and laying fires, tending linen, mending, sewing, and any other chores expected of them" (Raybourn). Witnessing these facts in the context of a narrative, where each detail is skillfully woven in, makes the entire text a fascinating display of both information and entertainment. By just reading about the characters choice of dress for an evening ball, and the conversations she engaged in while attending it, researchers can construct a vision of this historical moment across time.

The story goes further to work in extremely precise details of the past, such as the contents of an earl's pocket: "a penknife, a piece of honeycomb," as well as "a tin whistle, a ball of catgut, and a pocket edition of Coleridge"; and the layout of a marquess' home: "the floor was chequered in a traditional pattern, but the tiles were emerald and grey marble, both subtly veined in gold," and recesses around the room, which "which might have held pretty vases or arrangements of hothouse blooms in other homes, instead sheltered an assortment of black marble busts of Roman emperors" (Raybourn). Some details, such as those regarding the elements that differentiated the marquess' home from others in that particular quarter, are included so briefly in the narrative that they can easily be overlooked. However, by reading between the lines, researchers and consumers alike will realize how they may benefit from the subtle knowledge they are gaining as they explore the narrative.

Other inclusions that provide cultural context are more outwardly stated, such as the character's musings on one woman's desire to work with electricity: "Her experiments have frequently been dismissed by male scientists as frivolous and unworthy," and the improvement that mechanical cleaning machines would have made on worker's lives: "Their time could be freed for the pursuit of education or entertainment, their hours better spent in activities chosen to uplift their spirits and enrich their minds than the current dull repetitions of household drudgery" (Raybourn). Creating a female character who herself feels frustration towards the diminishing treatment of other women, reducing them to menial tasks and disbelieving in their academic abilities, proves another dimension to the significance of this genre.

Such perspectives could be further used to explore the shared contempt by a faction of women who, in the actual past, would have had the same thoughts and feelings.

Historical crime fiction is a diverse genre in itself, as the novels conducted within it can span hundreds of years, bringing back to life traditions and culture that have long been lost. Devotion to this field is vital, as taking various academic works that solely describe the past and transforming them into meaningful, alive-again representations invites anyone to enjoy history, rather than only those who focus on studying it. By looking at historical crime fiction novels with this lens, it can be understood that they are not just fictional installments in the literary world, but useful methods to track culture, the evolution of society, and of course, how crime itself has changed.

The Dressmaker's Society

CHAPTER 1

The sun rose slowly, painstakingly, as if it did not want to inflict another day upon the unsuspecting townspeople. From behind the bars of the factory window, Elizabeth watched what she could see of the blinding outline through the dirt-streaked window, her heart soaring as the ball of fire illuminated the morning sky, painting streaks of pale yellow among the blue. The presence of light influenced movement within London, spurring dense chatter among working men and excited cries of children as they skipped down the crowded streets to their lessons. Vendors dragged their wooden carts across the cobblestones to select a selling spot before laying out their precious items for sale, ranging from rice and sugar to cotton and hammers. Their careful arrangements of products brought a smile to Elizabeth's face; she too had worked the tedious job of selling, and while she did not miss the extensive hours and dirty looks of passersby, she respected their efforts.

"Come now, we haven't got all day!" Nellie called tauntingly from behind her.

Elizabeth could hear the laughter in her voice, and turned to face the young girl, just nine years old, her own protégée. They were not quite related, but she had taken Nellie under her wing from their first day of meeting at the factory, and now the two behaved like sisters. A smattering of dusty red freckles danced across her face, nearly matching the amber tone of her shortly cropped bob. Straight and thick, it swung across her shoulders as she shook her head disapprovingly.

“You’re taking ages at the window. I want a turn.”

Elizabeth acquiesced, hopping off the overturned metal pot and hoisting Nellie up. The girl gasped at the sight, as she did every morning.

“Nellie, you look at the same thing every day,” Elizabeth sighed, though she could not help but grin at her eagerness.

“They’re living wonderfully, making their earnings. What freedom!”

“You could almost compare it to our plight,” Elizabeth grunted, lifting Nellie back to the ground.

The room of their crowded boarding house, which occupied the top level of the factory, that she turned to face was not necessarily as lively and promising as the world outside. It instead held a mere thirty mattresses placed precariously on decaying brass bed frames, a singular tinted window, and a mass of stained dresses, worn shoes, and simple possessions. The girls lying in the beds slowly began to stir as the light shone upon their faces, groaning at the prospect of another day of work.

Elizabeth looked at them, feeling a tenderness in her chest. Even though she was in the same situation as they were, she considered the opportunity to work as a seamstress as just that, a means to make her own independent living. The others perhaps weren’t so lucky; some had been introduced to the trade as orphans, others from bankruptcy, some immigrants, most plucked off the streets and forced into the profession.

For every thirty girls who resented their profession, there would be one who made light of it. Nellie took on this role among her deflated peers, who knew and had

accepted the unending future they faced in the factory, but her hope had not yet been crushed. Elizabeth watched as she ran to the washroom, eager to make use of the few minutes of hot water they could fill their tub with each day. The others did not bother to move while she occupied the single basin.

Elizabeth, having washed with ice cold water hours before, moved to her bedframe and reached inside of her wood paneled trunk. It saddened her to pick the same dull, woolen dress every day, as she encountered beautifully patterned and colored cloth in her work. Steeling her shoulders back, she dragged the coarse material across her skin with a shudder. Her bonnet was similarly thick, scraping against her hair and effectively knotting it. She was not styling herself for anyone, but often succumbed to an imagination filled with wonder about how beautiful the women who bought their dresses were, and how she might appear if she had hours to spend on her own appearance. The room finally began to fill with noise as the girls chattered to each other while donning their matching outfits. They soon all became part of a mass, their individuality forever stripped except for these moments, where they could lightly discuss their hopes and dreams. Elizabeth tensed as the noise rose, glancing at the door. If they became too loud, Mr. Wilson would appear, and the spurring of vicious words he would unleash was never pleasant.

Eventually, everyone had the opportunity to bathe, dress, and make their way through the damp and dimly lit hallways to the unassuming kitchen. Drops of dirty water hit some girls in the face and shoulders as they walked below broken pipes, a clear safety hazard that had never been identified by the city. They knew better than to

complain, however, as Mr. Wilson assured them that he would address the issue, yet he never did. Believing that he would insinuate that he cared about their health, and every worker knew it was quite the opposite.

Breakfast was the same each morning, a disappointing serving of flavorless porridge. Elizabeth picked up her bowl from the chef with a kind smile, noting the sagging features in the older woman's face. While her ice blue eyes should have been beautiful and inviting, they instead penetrated Elizabeth's, filled with pain that she could not describe. Elizabeth could not imagine the monotony she faced as she prepared the same meals day after day, watching the women progressively become weaker due to their small portions and tedious working hours.

"What shall we make today?" Nellie asked excitedly, shoveling a spoonful of the steaming mush into her mouth as Elizabeth sank into a chair across from her.

"The same things as every day," Mary muttered into her bowl.

Elizabeth shot her a glance. "Maybe we will have a textile delivery."

"That would be fantastic for you, would it not? You travel into town to pick it up," Mary said brazenly, her eyes blazing with unfettered anger.

"One day, he may pass the responsibility along, if someone else demonstrates enough promise." Elizabeth bowed her head, sternly ending the conversation.

The remainder of the meal was consumed in silence, as they often were. Elizabeth tried to ignore the sounds of excited chatter on the other side of the factory's walls, where vendors yelled about their products and friends engaged in the streets.

Within, all they would hear were the sound of the machines that whirred incessantly for hours on end, and the occasional shout of their overseer.

"I will not have this useless standing!" Mr. Wilson's voice boomed across the hall as he looked upon them with heavy brows, always knitted with anger. The silence grew even deeper, now motivated by fear.

Not a single eye that looked upon their boss was kind, but he either did not notice, or did not care. It was most likely the latter option.

"Another day of hard work ahead. Orders are now tenfold, and your production is not nearly fast enough." Further silence. "Get started, now. You are all lucky to be here."

Chairs scraped loudly against the tiled floors, their screeching echoing off the high ceilings, while the women rose from their tables. They dumped their used bowls and utensils into a vat of soapy water as they passed from the kitchen into another hallway, one which opened into a vast room filled with machinery.

Entering the room each day reminded Elizabeth of the first time she was introduced to her new working environment. Her heart had pounded as she walked on past women concentrated behind massive workings of metal, some bravely sticking their hands into the moving parts, seemingly unfearful of the risk they posed to their limbs. Their concern was effectively erased by their salary, as nobody could afford to refuse a task. Instead, each worked in seemingly perfect unison, just as the cogs of the machines they operated.

Now with five years of her own experience, she understood the need for such perfectionism, as she had advanced in just a few months to more impressive responsibilities, including personalized projects. Their orders never abated, and there seemed to always be new requirements to fulfill. The approaching month of March, which brought about slightly warmer temperatures and soft sunshine to part through the sludge of dreary days, also meant that London's social season was on the horizon. Elizabeth's heart palpitated at the thought of the dozens of orders each woman would be assigned to keep up with the superfluous events occurring in town; it tended to be Mr. Wilson's unkindest period, and those too frail to withstand his brutal expectations would snap.

She glanced over at Nellie as the girl hummed to herself, monitoring her spinning mule independently. The job typically called for multiple workers, as the spinning of cotton fibers into thread produced quick output that needed to be collected and cleaned often, but Mr. Wilson supposedly did not have the funds to employ more workers. Nellie thrust her hand underneath the machine, gathering the bits of thread that had fallen, and Elizabeth winced as a strand of her hair flipped dangerously close to the spinning wheels. They had only recently held a small funeral for a child only hired months previously who had lost her life to the unforgiving cogs of a power loom. Mr. Wilson hadn't bothered to attend or help, so Elizabeth had coordinated the construction of a tiny coffin and a burial in the pouring rain. The women sobbed together over a young life taken so brutally, pledging to enforce each other's safety. To an extent, there was only so much they could do to keep watch, as they needed to

focus intently on their own work, but Elizabeth had promised herself that she would keep a close eye on her coworkers, specifically Nellie. The girl hadn't spoken for weeks following Lucy's death, as Elizabeth knew they had grown quite close. Too often she had seen tears welling up in Nellie's eyes which she blinked away furiously, wringing out her shaking hands to properly operate her spinning mule. There was simply no room for error.

The room quickly filled with the clattering of machinery as each woman started up their task for the day. Elizabeth shook herself out of painful memories and turned to her own work, which involved hemming and attaching lacework to the bulk numbers of dresses that the others created. She was almost lucky to have such a position, as it tended to be the highest-ranked role that anyone in the factory could hold, and meant that she herself was not responsible for the operation of anything moving other than her hands.

Nevertheless, she sighed heavily as she consulted her workbook, in which the others recorded the dresses they had dropped off for her to complete. The list was extensive, with women placing multiple requests daily that piled up before she could even count them. Elizabeth worked as effectively as she could, but as the last step in each order before it was delivered, she always felt mounting pressure to work faster. If she held up an order, the slow production was blamed solely on her. She had accepted never satisfying Mr. Wilson, but the girls looked on so eagerly while she snuck in nightly lessons of stitching and embroidery, and so she wanted to make them proud.

Maria Johnson's dress was needed for the following evening, where she would be attending a gala. Elizabeth stood and approached her chest which was now overflowing with unfinished work. The dress tagged with Maria's name was beautiful—cream colored with large bell sleeves and deep pleats across the bosom.

Elizabeth picked up the dress carefully and brought it over to her workstation, setting out the tools she would need to add accouterments to the item. The sleeves themselves needed to be cleaned, and Elizabeth found even herself humming as she performed a gathering stitch down the back edge of each sleeve, her fingers working in perfect harmony. She loved working with her hands and considered her profession to be one similar to artistry. Every detail was carefully planned and executed, and if anything was amiss, it could ruin the perception of the piece. She particularly enjoyed work which she had more creative freedom over, as her days of learning how to sew from her mother had only included the most basic stitches, for very simple orders. It was only as she had grown older that she had taught herself how to add gems, diamonds, beads, and lace to her pieces, skills which had propelled her to the top of the factory's working chain and afforded her these special projects.

Slowly, the hours passed. Elizabeth's eyes began to cross as she held fabric close to her face, working intently on the precious details for each piece. By the end of the workday, she was quite satisfied with all she had accomplished, specifically ignoring the surplus of new dresses she was given from the other women who had also finished their own tasks. She mostly worked on channeling her feelings into

excitement for the fact that everyone was being productive, even if it meant that her position grew more difficult.

Through the ringing in her ears, she somehow discerned the familiar bell calling for their evening dinner. Silence found its way back into the room as everyone shut down their machines, leaving just the soft whirring behind as their steam engines powered down. Light chatter again filled the halls as the women made their way back to the dining hall, now thoroughly exhausted.

Elizabeth tried again to greet their chef with a smile as she was handed her food, but yet again, the woman stared only onto her plate, not meeting her eye. Elizabeth followed her gaze down to the woman's lower body, for the first time noticing a peculiar tattoo on the woman's wrist, exposed by her open sleeves. She couldn't help gawking, as the only other tattoo she had ever seen had been on the arm of a noble woman she was fitting for a dress, and even then, she hadn't quite understood what it meant.

Memories of conversations the other women had held about society began to swim in her head, as they often discussed such taboo topics with glee in the evenings. Only sailors, soldiers, and the aristocracy possessed them, as in the opinion of the working class, the dark ink indicated both carelessness and a flaunting of wealth and ability. She had never desired for one on her own body, as the idea of such permanency made her shudder, but she couldn't deny feeling curious about the practice.

Elizabeth was still pondering the symbol as she sat in her chair and began to eat. Nellie instantly noticed her absent mindedness.

"Are you alright?" She asked sweetly, gazing upon Elizabeth's face with an expression of concern.

"I am quite alright."

"What did you make today?" Nellie asked, shoveling a piece of dry bread into her mouth.

"My favorite project was emboldening the bell sleeves on a cream dress. I think the woman who wears it will be the subject of her ball," Elizabeth laughed.

A few others at the table chuckled, each wishing they would have the opportunity to be such a woman. Some looked on enviously as the clothing they worked so hard on was worn only once, and then thrown away or discarded in the back of an extensive wardrobe. Of course, society women could not be seen wearing certain articles more than once, as their fashion choices mattered so greatly. However, Elizabeth knew that many struggled to part with their beautiful creations, instead imagining how they would style each item. Just as she wished she could spend more time on her physical appearance, she even more often envisioned many dresses she would love to wear, paired with certain heels and other accessories that she had seen out in town.

Elizabeth smiled mournfully to herself, knowing she would only ever dream of such days. Perhaps some of the younger girls had a chance of earning enough savings to move their way up in the workforce, but Elizabeth dutifully spent her funds on

others, knowing she could give the starving stranger an extra pence, rather than buying a hat or purse. Still, everyone could possess an imagination for free.

"What about anyone else? What did you make today for the beau monde?" Nellie asked, glancing around the table.

There were a few moments of silence as the girls thought back to their ten-hour workday, attempting to remember projects they had begun in the early morning.

"I mended a corset that Lillie ripped today," Josephine giggled.

Lillie, a teenager with newly developed and taxing emotions, immediately flushed to her roots. She shoved Josephine in the shoulder determinedly, laughing as she did so.

Josephine gasped as her hand, intent on hitting the bench to protect her from falling, instead smacked into her bowl of soup, sending the metal dish clattering across the floor. The horrifying sound echoed loudly as the bowl rolled several times before settling several feet away.

If the beans spread across the ground weren't insulting enough, the silence that followed from the other girls sealed Josephine's fear. Within moments, Mr. Wilson slammed open the kitchen door, which hit the wall with such force that it caused the girls' teeth to smack together.

Every eye in the room looked on with dread as his crisp black shoes hit the concrete with slow, forceful steps. Mr. Wilson took his time approaching the mess, knowing the terror he caused in his workers. He savored it, the ultimate power he held over them, the way he could make them do his bidding at any moment he desired.

Josephine's ice-blue eyes watered with tears as she looked upon his imposing figure. His shadow covered the light emitting from a nearby candlestick, casting a dark cloud over her pale complexion.

"You did this?" His words dripped with menace as he pointed a strict finger to the bean covered floor.

Josephine whimpered as she nodded.

Mr. Wilson smiled evilly before bending down to meet her eyes. Without hesitation, he swung his arm back before delivering a powerful slap to her face. The impact was so strong that Josephine's thin body was hurled off the bench, landing in the soup she hadn't gotten to eat. As she looked back up at him, her entire body shaking, the red outline of his hand had already imprinted itself on her cheek.

"Clean this mess up," Mr. Wilson snarled, before turning on his heel and storming out of the room. The silence that prevailed was deafening, except for Josephine's weeping.

Elizabeth stood from her seat and rushed to Josephine's side, pulling the trembling girl into her embrace.

"It is alright, it was an accident," she soothed.

"I might cast up my accounts," Josephine said softly, her face a dull shade of green. The other girls moved out of her way as she rose and fled from the room, presumably running to the back of the factory.

Elizabeth watched her go, her heart pained. She turned to the table. "Nellie, may you please deliver me some cloth to wipe this up?"

Nellie jumped up instantly, shaking her head so feverishly that her bob swung across her shoulders. When she returned, handing down pieces of cloth that had been scrapped from projects earlier in the day, they worked together to wipe the dinner from the floor. Elizabeth ensured that not a trace of it could be found by Mr. Wilson, as she knew he would look, and she knew what his next punishment for Josephine would be.

The others slowly grabbed their empty dishes and placed them in the vat of soapy water before trudging back to their rooms. Any sense of enjoyment or camaraderie for the evening had been destroyed, rather, their bedroom was filled with empty stillness.

Only Josephine's quiet sobs could disrupt such tranquility as the girls faded into slumber.

CHAPTER 2

The evening air was brisk and much colder than Elizabeth had imagined it would be. As she gently made her way down the cobblestone path that lay behind the factory, she wished she had brought her coat. Hugging her arms tightly across her chest only fostered so much warmth, and again reminded her that the suffocating air of the factory's rooms were never truly indicative of the outside temperature.

Instead, she tried to remind herself of the freedom she got to experience by attending her meetings at night. If caught by Mr. Wilson, she would be thrown out of work, but she had spent enough time underneath him to know his daily routine and thus did not feel overwhelmingly threatened by his presence.

She left the factory behind gleefully, instead enthralled by the city that she only got to watch each day as it passed her by. Elizabeth loved looking on with an appreciative eye at what the townspeople got to enjoy, unaware that they had everything that the lower classes dreamed of. Especially compared to the boisterous nature of the streets during the day, the stillness of London at night was startling.

She always found herself drawn to the local pubs. They had their fair share of drunkards and rowdy men, whom she always smirked at when she passed by, as those too inebriated to maintain proper decency would sing songs and chant at her with glee. If they didn’t have intentions to follow up on their roughhousing, she found it flattering. But rather, she most favored the intellectual discussion one could find in such an environment, where the conversation passed around the table just as readily as

the drinks was stimulating and compelling. Before finding work in the factory, she had been a costermonger in the streets. She often woke early and rushed to the city's center to obtain the best selling spot, particularly where she would encounter family women who might buy her fruit and vegetables.

This often meant she was also situated near the local pubs, and able to listen in to the noise from their open windows. Once, she had observed an entire conversation on what the stars could mean, and the skewed perspectives that local men had on astronomy were insightful. Even more so was their passion for the subject, as drinks flowed and their arguments grew both stronger and louder.

The mahogany paneled walls overlined with brick made her heart ache slightly as she passed them by, intent on her destination. The pub was closed and dark, save for one man slumped across a tabletop, snoring softly. His stained white shirt and tousled hair indicated a night well spent.

Elizabeth chuckled again before turning the corner, now leaving the rows of shops and institutions to a more desolate area by the water's edge. Her feet hit the stones with a crunch and she winced slightly, not wishing to draw attention to herself. While it seemed that nobody was nearby, she had heard too many stories of journeymen lurking in the shadows, waiting to prey on unsuspecting victims. She shuddered and quickened her pace, each step sinking into the mass of stones as they rustled together.

The lapping of the water was peaceful, and for just a moment, Elizabeth stopped to gaze at the reflection of the moon on the ocean. The shimmering path was

mesmerizing, and she couldn't help feeling entranced by the Earth's independent movement.

This tranquility was broken by the sudden sensation of pressure on her shoulder.

"Ah!" Elizabeth shrieked, her heart fluttering with panic as she stumbled away from her uninvited guest. The stones clattered together with urgency as she struggled to regain her balance.

"Aren't you mad as hops!" Margaret laughed, stepping into the light so Elizabeth could see her face.

Elizabeth panted for a few moments, attempting to catch her breath. "My dear Margaret, that could have caused me heart failure."

"You were so peaceful, I had to disrupt it," Margaret chuckled, looping her arm through Elizabeth's. "No coat?"

"I did not think I would need one this evening," Elizabeth sighed, annoyed she was being reprimanded for the mistake she had already decided she'd made.

"Ah, you likely do not. I think we are expecting some strong company this evening," Margaret said.

The pair finally passed through the beach and reached the port. Rather than stepping up to the platform that would take them to the street, they ducked below, entering a hidden pathway that trailed the road above. Elizabeth never liked crawling through such a damp passageway, as she always found herself in need of washing upon returning to her bed each night. This was never a task she could complete

without waking the others, forcing her to sleep in a disgusting state and rise early to wash even before Nellie.

Margaret chattered away, and it was some time before she realized that Elizabeth was not paying attention.

"Oi! Am I boring you?"

"My apologies." Elizabeth came to a stop in the alley, turning to fully face her friend.

Margaret's eyes widened with concern when she saw the ashy complexion of Elizabeth's face, and the deep hurt behind her eyes. The sound of rats scurrying among them echoed as she waited patiently for her typically attentive peer to explain what exactly was bothering her.

"Josephine was slapped by Mr. Wilson today. For spilling her dinner."

Silence hung for a few moments. "He hurt her badly, did he not?" Margaret said softly, reading the concern in Elizabeth's features.

"I am concerned that he hurt her in more ways than one," Elizabeth replied, hugging her arms to her chest, as if she was still comforting the young girl.

"Well, we have established that he is unjust, and he is the reason why we are doing things like this. Getting out there. Making our voice heard." Margaret smiled, showing her yellowing teeth proudly.

"You're right." Elizabeth brightened slightly, grabbing Margaret's hand and giving it a reassuring squeeze. It wouldn't fix the hurt in her own heart, but for now, it would have to do.

Together, they continued down the path until they reached a decaying door. With a grunt, Margaret pushed it open to reveal an expansive room filled with fifteen other women. Some still wore their working clothes, while others were dressed in modest pajamas and daywear, clearly having anticipated the night's meeting. Elizabeth nodded to some as she and Margaret made their way to the front of the room, where a small bench had been overturned to act as a podium.

The abandoned factory worked perfectly as a secluded location for the women to arrange themselves in. In their early days, they had delegated tasks to each group, with some collecting chairs and stools for seating, others spreading the word, and most picking other areas from where they could keep watch and alert the women to disperse if they were discovered. Over the course of several months, they had truly blossomed into a more-established rebellious organization, with concrete plans to make a name for themselves.

The two took their seats on the bench closest to the front, just before the door slammed open once more. This time, the excitement felt in the room was palpable, as each attendee scrambled to their seats in time before the woman could walk down the middle aisle.

She was clearly confident, wearing unspeakable garments that most in society would have turned a judging eye to. Rather than their commonplace restrictive silhouettes and gowns, her flowing grey shirt was tucked into a pair of pantaloons. Tall black boots, scuffed with mud, covered her feet. Her wrists were adjourned with

dozens of grey bangles which clinked together as she walked, drawing more attention to her dazzling persona.

Elizabeth caught only a glimpse of the shine captured in her brunette waves before Clara Williams reached the podium and turned to face the room. The smile on her concentrated face encouraged a rise in cheers for the women, who quieted once she raised an arm.

"Welcome, women, to our equal rights group," she called out, eliciting more noise.

Elizabeth smiled along, recalling the earliest days with only three of them present as they planned on how to solicit members for their cause. She had personally persuaded attendance for most of the women in the room, all of them being seamstresses, by having passionate conversations about the rights they deserved and those they currently experienced. Just a few rows back sat Florence, a dear friend from her own factory. The two traveled to the meetings separately, out of fear that they might both be followed, but Elizabeth always felt a sense of comfort in her kind and familiar face.

"We have much to cover today," Clara continued. "I request updates from each working group of your progress. Liverpool, you begin."

A short and stout woman seated near the back of the room rose passionately. Her face, scrunched into a determined grin, was still covered with dust, presumably from the day's operation of an older machine. She cleared her throat several times before beginning.

“We have collected a list of women in our area who have either been terminated or become too ill to seek work in the previous several weeks, for your review.” She made her way down the aisle and handed a crumpled piece of paper to Clara, who looked over it sadly.

“So terrible to see so many names,” she tutted, her eyes scanning the expansive list. “Never the mind, we will provide for them. Norwich?”

This prompted the attention of another short woman, this time with knotted blonde curls forced into messy braids that sank down to her hips.

“We have done the same, Clara. Here is our list.”

“Wonderful,” Clara said, accepting the paper with a purposeful handshake. “Bristol?”

“Clara, we have brought a new member for the group this evening.” The woman who spoke for Bristol was one of Elizabeth’s favorites. Her sparkling green eyes were captivating, and she moved with such grace that she could easily integrate into upper society if she had the wealth to show for it.

“My dear, welcome!” Clara beamed. “And what is your name?”

The woman who answered was meek, and her voice quivered slightly as she answered. “It is Penelope, miss.”

“Penelope, we are delighted to have you. From Windsor?”

At this, it was Elizabeth who stood. “We have begun circulating conversation about our movement to other female workers in the area.”

The snap of Clara's eyes to Elizabeth proved that her attention was caught. "Excellent! How have you done so?"

"We have Florence to express gratitude for. She was sent for a textile collection this past week and entered a private discussion with the cloth maker in a nearby factory. The woman promised that she would speak to her friends and stated that she would like to make an appearance in one of our upcoming meetings."

The room erupted in applause as Florence blushed heavily, though she was clearly proud of her efforts. Elizabeth had already told her how excited the council would be, and from their reaction, she was not disappointed.

"This is exactly how we will make our voices heard. Stupendous work, Windsor. And lastly, Newcastle?"

Margaret stood forcefully, her braids bouncing down her back. "I ran a public experiment this week, miss. While she is not here this evening, one of my bricky young workers, Kelly, offered to purposefully anger our factory overseer, to see how he might react to such outbursts."

Those in the room gasped at the potential consequences of such a decision, which could not have been made or taken lightly.

Margaret swallowed loudly before continuing. "She ripped a stitch in a completed piece of work, which was expected the following evening. While I disagreed with this decision, she also did it directly underneath the eye of our overseer and stated it as her form of protest. He was furious, and nearly took a fall in his rush to

get down to the factory floor to confront her. I cannot share the gruesome details of what next took place, but Kelly will be in our infirmary until future notice."

"How horrific!"

"That poor girl."

"What a noble sacrifice."

Clara raised her arms again, effectively silencing the chatter that had begun. "Surely, this was not done without purpose?"

"Of course not," Margaret grinned. "I have connections with the papers in town. I purposefully invited a dear friend of mine to meet me that evening, right outside of the building. I have no doubts that he heard everything that took place, and is probably sharing his news with his working peers as we speak. While it will likely not be printed, it has started the conversation."

"Wow," Clara herself gasped. "That is certainly one method. Thank you, Margaret. But please, let us not endanger ourselves more than is already necessary for our cause. We will have to honor Kelly's efforts in some way."

Margaret nodded and retook her seat. The comment sent another chill down Elizabeth's spine as she thought of the mark on Josephine's cheek, and wondered what could have been done to Kelly to send her to the infirmary.

"Now, I am extremely gracious towards all your efforts. If you have not already seen results, you should pay closer mind. We have begun to revolutionize a movement that men can only dream of, and our work will pay off, I guarantee you. The further we spread our cause, the more women we engage, the greater chance we

stand at earning our rights. Have you not felt anger at your low wages? At the treatment that your overseers feel justified to take towards you? Are we not people who deserve better?"

"We are!" The room again erupted in a collective cheer.

"Our work will not go unnoticed. As the seamstresses of this city, and those who run their textile mills, society would be lost without our efforts." Clara paused in her riling speech at the sight of Penelope's hand raised in the audience.

"Pardon me, miss, as it is my first time seeing your cause. If we provide their clothing, why should we not just revolt? Boycott, and leave our stations? Surely this would be more effective?" The meek girl from only minutes before had disappeared, leaving behind a young woman suddenly enthralled by a collective cause.

"It is a wonderful point which you make, Penelope. It is of course a concept that I have deeply considered, but not something that I can encourage that we do. Have you ever heard of the Halifax Strike?"

Penelope nodded unconfidently. "It just passed last year, correct?"

"It did," Clara nodded. "Do you recall the events that took place?"

Penelope shook her head.

"Just as we are meeting and deciding now, factory workers wished to rebel against their unacceptable wages and treatment by their overseers. The movement grew strong, and joined together different workers, who controlled many types of production. By refusing to complete their work, sure, they stalled the city. However, when they met and began to march, they were combatted by brutal force from our dear

leaders. Hundreds were killed or wounded, and they did not succeed in their mission. Therefore, I believe that we must work on our revolution from the inside. Turning this into a matter of sheer physical force is not something that we will win, but rather, a competition of willpower and intelligence."

"I understand, miss."

"You all have made such progress in our goals. I believe that by uniting every single working woman in this city, we can start a movement to overturn those who have failed us. We can open our own economic systems, and work for each other. These are the early days, but a significant movement to start in. You should all be proud."

The applause that sounded was enthusiastic as Clara stepped down from the podium. She waved brightly to every woman in the room as she walked down the aisle, thanking each one personally for their efforts. Once the door closed behind her, soft chatter resumed.

Elizabeth turned to Margaret, whose eyes were shining brightly. "Listen to all that we have accomplished!"

"It is delightful," Elizabeth agreed. There wasn't an expression in the room that wasn't filled with utter pride and determination as the women began to take their leave.

Florence emerged from the crowd, her face flushed. Before she could speak at all, Margaret had embraced her tightly.

"You have spread the word!"

Florence beamed over her shoulder. “I have only acted as Elizabeth has taught me.”

Elizabeth laughed. “Please my dear, take the credit. It is well deserved.”

The three linked arms as they reached the door, where they were greeted again by the damp hallway.

“I cannot wait for the days where we can hold our meetings above ground,” Margaret murmured, picking up her foot to allow a rat to scurry past.

“It will come,” Elizabeth reassured her. “It will come.”

CHAPTER 3

"*Elizabeth! How dare you waste your goods! They are precious. You will not be eating for a week," her father snarled, looking at the empty crate that Elizabeth held in shaking hands.*

"But father, I—"

"I won't hear of it. Your wages and the state of this basket do not align, Elizabeth. I know you did not sell everything. You gave it away. Be honest, now."

Elizabeth turned tear-filled eyes to her mother, who stood by the oven with her arms crossed, watching the scene unfold. Even though she could feel the remorse emulating from the woman, as her posture was nearly doubled with the weight of her guilt, she made no sign to intervene. As difficult as it was, she agreed with her husband. Her children could not be wasting their food.

"Alright," Elizabeth sighed shakily. "Father, I promise I had almost completed my sales for the day. And I made great progress. But these two young children approached me. They were starving. I could see their bones."

"Can you not see our own?" Her father shrieked, his face reddening.

"I only gave them an apple each. It was a matter of them living through the evening, father. They did not stand a chance."

"And what happens tomorrow evening? They will not last a week, if they are relying on such things to stay alive. You cannot waste our products on street scum.

Your mother and I work to our own death to provide for you, and this behavior is an insult."

His voice grew louder, and Elizabeth shut her eyes, preparing herself for what was coming next. The impact of his hand on her face was never pleasant, but it was growing familiar. Elizabeth cried out in pain as the slap sent her to the floor, where her father began to kick her in the stomach, and then the back, until she sobbed.

"I expect to see double of your profits tomorrow."

The door to the home slammed shut, sending particles of dirt streaming down onto her face from the aged ceiling. Elizabeth curled into a ball, holding her aching body, whimpering. Through her blurry vision, she watched her mother leave the room with hesitant footsteps. It was only after they were both gone that another set appeared, this time attached to her brother.

"Are you alright?" Oliver asked, lending a small hand out to her immobile form.

Elizabeth shuddered, wiping the tears from her cheeks, and accepted his help to rise from the floor. Although it pained her greatly, she refused to show it, and instead flashed him a smile.

"Why don't we practice your maths," she suggested, placing a hand on his back and guiding him to his bedroom.

"Only because you want to," Oliver grumbled, allowing himself to be led.

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When Elizabeth blinked herself awake, she was not surprised to find tears on her cheeks. Her hands were ice cold on her face as she rushed to wipe them away before the others noticed. Luckily, dusk was still on the horizon, and the soft snores of the working women continued to fill the peaceful room.

Elizabeth gently pulled her paper-thin sheet off her body and climbed out of bed before heading to the washroom. She was eager to rinse herself of the previous evening's journey, and didn't mind the sacrifice which meant she had to use the stale water of yesterday.

She stripped from her nightgown and sank into the freezing water. Her teeth began to chatter instantly, but she ignored the pain as she instead used the sponge with a single sliver of stained soap to clean herself. This luxury was recent, as Mr. Wilson had begrudgingly agreed to provide them with a bar of soap each year to share. The women each took careful turns to use only a small amount, and to rotate on their own system for who had earned a bath during the week. Elizabeth took less than she owed to allow herself multiple washes, but did not share her method with anyone else—it would likely cause upheaval in the workplace.

While she did not necessarily feel cleansed, she knew it was eventually time to prepare herself for the day. It was the same routine to follow as every single morning, and her heart warmed ever so slightly with the familiarity of it.

Today, she strode across the room while everyone pulled on their clothes to find Josephine. The girl seemed to be mute as she pulled on her dress. The exact

imprint of Mr. Wilson's hand had faded, but her right cheek was still slightly tinged with red.

"Are you alright?" Elizabeth asked Josephine in a low tone, not wishing for the others to overhear.

Josephine turned to her gratefully. "I am. Thank you for your help."

Elizabeth smiled softly, hoping it reached her eyes, before turning and leading the morning precession down the hallway towards the kitchen. It was as she grabbed her bowl of porridge from the chef that she remembered another moment from the previous day that had caught her attention. The tattoo.

This time, she spent careful time admiring the woman's exposed wrist, to the point where she knew the chef noticed. The older woman only growled at Elizabeth's slow pace in the line, however. Knowing she wouldn't be getting any information in the tensity of their shared moment, Elizabeth again thanked her for the food. The chef's eyes followed the young seamstress' back as she walked towards her table, wondering what her sudden interest could be attributed to.

The meal passed quickly, as the girls did not plan to engage Mr. Wilson's temper that day. He already looked furious as he stomped around the upper level of the kitchen, watching the girls like a hawk, waiting for them to make another mistake. At the second that he had decided they had eaten for long enough, he made his booming voice heard.

"Enough! You all must double your output today to make up for the food we lost yesterday. I expect no errors or complaints. Move!"

Josephine whimpered softly as she picked up her bowl carefully, holding it as though it was a fragile egg that could crack on its own at any moment. Lillie put a reassuring hand on her back as they walked to their work stations, a moment which did not go unnoticed by Elizabeth.

Technically, both girls had fault in the incident at hand, but only one would be suffering the consequences, and Lillie knew it. Elizabeth just appreciated that she was supporting her friend.

She was still smiling as she approached her own work. Before she could flip open to the necessary page of her notes, however, it was her own name being demanded by Mr. Wilson's cruel tone. She shot up from her seat and hurried up the metal stairs to the top floor of the factory, where Mr. Wilson had a small office.

Despite him calling for her, she still knocked slowly on the glass door which separated them before entering. Behind his massive wooden desk, the man looked even more imposing. His grey suit for the day was already soaked with sweat, as the heat from the running machines rose into his tiny room, which was sealed as effectively as a sauna. She tried to ignore the beads of sweat among his upper lip and hairline.

"What a dinner that was yesterday, was it not?" Mr. Wilson taunted, his mouth twisting into a sneer.

Elizabeth knew better than to take the bait, and instead nodded in solidarity, though she could feel her cheeks burning with anger. Mr. Wilson studied the strong-willed woman before him. The light from his exterior windows glowed on her red

face, although it highlighted her sharp jawline and carved cheekbones nicely. Her eyes, glossy brown, studied him intently.

"I have been tasked with a special assignment, just today. You are to travel to the home of Anastasia Shaw to fit her for and design an evening gown. Here is the address. You will walk," he said, thrusting a crumpled piece of paper at her.

Elizabeth gulped as she grabbed it. While she always enjoyed making trips, the solidarity of each project amounted to such intense pressure to complete every step correctly. The ladies she worked for also tended to never be kind or appreciative, either.

"Are you waiting for me to escort you? Get on with it," he snapped.

Elizabeth nodded and left the room, scanning the sprawled handwriting that would direct her to her destination. She recognized the address, of course located across town in the wealthy part of society, where people could buy houses much larger than they needed and adjourn them with expensive jewels and tokens.

As she trotted back down the staircase, she exchanged sympathetic glances with most of the girls, who knew of her upcoming adventure the moment they noticed the paper in her hand. Most looked jealous, mainly that they would be stuck inside in such perilous conditions while she had the opportunity to explore. Mary in particular had an expression of deep indignation on her face, feeling intense betrayal over her failure to ever acquire such a job.

Only Nellie exchanged a bright smile with Elizabeth as she approached her workstation to collect her traveling items. The two could only look upon each other briefly, as Nellie too had to turn back to her own work.

The air outside of the factory was cool in contrast to the enclosed space and Elizabeth took in greedy gulps, letting the sunshine warm her cheeks, before turning down the road. If she breathed too deeply, her senses would be overwhelmed by the stench of the Thames which flowed lazily along nearby, carrying pounds of discarded waste. The crinkling of trash as it merged and split by the force of the current was constant, reminding the people of their mess. Too often, as she packed up her own cart for the day, she had witnessed shopkeepers slipping out of the backs of their buildings to toss trash into the water, clouding the already murky surface. She had even heard rumors of city workers dumping human waste, but this she refused to pay mind to.

Several shopkeepers nodded towards her as she passed, recognizing her from her previous work, and she enthusiastically greeted them all. She couldn't help stopping at a trinket cart run by a dear friend.

"Sarah! Good afternoon," Elizabeth beamed, reaching across her display to grasp hands.

"How lovely to see you, Elizabeth!" Sarah replied, sharing the enthusiasm. She wiped her hands down her apron before returning the gesture.

"How are things?" Elizabeth asked, gesturing to the road. Judging from her friend's full collection of items, she was thinking not entirely well, but could not be

the one to assume. If only she had the money to purchase a pocket watch or silver ring, even if only to aid her friend, who she knew provided for her entire family.

"Well, it is early still," Sarah chuckled, looking around at the dismal scene. Only a few townspeople puttered about the carts, each looking for something in particular and simultaneously dismissing the efforts of all other workers.

"I see. I am sure you will fare well today, my friend," Elizabeth said with a nod, before turning and resuming her stroll.

The walk was far, but Elizabeth did not mind observing everyone in their daily tasks. She passed a few servants scurrying through the streets, their faces worked into expressions of deep concern as they rushed to fulfill the extensive orders of their masters. If a block of cheese or single accessory was forgotten, it could mean the termination of a role that served only to keep them alive. She knew many longed for their freedom, but freedom on these streets was never truly that, and instead a more vicious battle of survival. Some stragglers would group together, but their mutual trust would be destroyed upon any opportunity to earn anything for themselves. Young boys skipped under the legs and past the skirts of everyone they passed, taunting each other and throwing their toys into the air. One army soldier, unluckily caught under the shoe of a wealthy woman who shrieked with dismay, was instantly confiscated despite the young child's request to have it returned.

His sobs filled the air until his sister, a young girl with crisp bows tied into her neatly plaited hair, offered him her rocking horse, which he grabbed from her outstretched hand to resume his play. Elizabeth smirked, instantly reminded of herself

and Oliver. Her heart panged involuntarily, but before she could fall too deeply into those memories, she realized she had reached the gated estate.

The house was magnificent. Elizabeth could barely suppress a gasp as she pushed on the heavy wrought iron gates that separated the wealthy from the street and made her way down the expansive lawn. Several bay windows, trimmed in ornate moldings, lined the exterior of the home, all surrounding the massive door. She could have doubled herself in height and still not reached the top. Through the stained-glass paneling on each side, she could see the shadow of a butler lying in wait to greet her.

With her hands shaking only slightly, Elizabeth adjusted her heavy bag over her shoulder, planted a genuine smile on her face, and used the door knocker to alert anyone to her presence. The booming sound echoed around her and she winced, hating the draw of attention it likely caused. As she predicted, the door swung open instantly. The man who smiled in return was wearing the cleanest tailcoat she had ever seen, with his strands of white hair neatly combed across his forehead. The wing collar of his stiff white shirt was pristine and danced on his neck.

“Greetings, miss,” he said graciously, taking in her disheveled appearance with a bemused gaze. None of his masters would ever take themselves in public in such a state.

“I have come to call upon Anastasia Shaw. I-I am a seamstress,” Elizabeth stammered. She knew she had the ability to assert herself, being a hired task maker for the home, but there was something about the order and established nature of the wealthy that always made her knees buckle.

“Please, after me,” the butler said, stepping aside to allow her entry.

This time, Elizabeth was more practiced in suppressing her surprise at the wealth indicated in the home, but just barely. Upon crossing the threshold, her eyes were instantly drawn upwards to a massively ornate brass chandelier displayed at the very top of the tall ceiling. It swung slowly, almost taunting those who had to look upon it to wonder how expensive it must have been. Elizabeth could make a guess, but for her own wellbeing, did not wish to allow the number to enter her head.

The rugs she walked upon were almost shamefully nice in comparison to the sticky floors of the factory. Swirls of flowers and other geometrical patterns in deep, intentional colors matched each step until she entered the reception room. With a purpose of intimidating and impressing guests as they waited for the family, here is where she truly felt out of place.

The room was bathed in pale blue, with two large windows on the walls that faced the path she had just strolled upon. Heavy curtains, pulled aside with thick brown rope, were made of a similar pattern and color to the flowery carpet. Most eye-catching was the cast iron fireplace, the central feature of the room, with stunning tiles that ran down each side and sparkled in the light. A fire crackled within, filling the space with the welcoming and warm ambiance that Elizabeth could not define; instead, she only felt the cool displays of wealth, the subtle brags.

What caught her eye next caused her to take a nearly undetectable step backwards. The painting hung above the fireplace would have challenged the front door for size, but the feature within questioned all. The man depicted was most

certainly unkind. His thick, dark hair curled at erratic angles, but the artist had captured specks of grey in the light from an outside window. A dark necktie hung underneath his chin, tucked into a crisp white collar. The velvet coat hugging his shoulders was likely more expensive than the wages she could earn in a year, and she looked upon it longingly, admiring the intricate work of the loom used to weave such a dense pile of fabric. Most frightening were his eyes, being a cloudy shade of grey. They harbored no light or emotion, merely a sense of empowerment and duty. Elizabeth could feel them piercing her own, as if asking her why she was in the room. She did not belong.

"Are you alright, miss?" The butler asked from behind with a bemused smile, having observed her moments of wonder.

Elizabeth started, willing her heart to stop beating out of her chest. "Oh yes, forgive me."

As she turned to follow his extended hand, which gestured to the plush loveseat, she could feel the man's eyes watching her.

"That is Lord Shaw," the butler spoke underneath his breath, tracing her exact train of thought.

Elizabeth whipped her head around to face him, now certain that he knew what she was thinking.

"If you are believing that he is cruel, you would be correct. He rules this home with an iron first. You will likely not meet him this afternoon, however, but instead

Lady Shaw. Have your wits about you," he warned, before stepping back to the side of the door at the sound of footsteps.

Elizabeth turned away from him, her eyes now wide with anticipation of what the family would require from her.

The women who next appeared did not disappoint.

CHAPTER 4

"It is you?" The older of the two wrinkled her nose as she entered the room, deterred by Elizabeth's shaggy appearance.

Elizabeth wrestled with herself and what she knew of societal respect before deciding it would be safer to keep her eyes glued to the floor. The patterned flowers began to blend as she fixed her focus several times.

"This?" Another voice added, this time shrill and loud.

A pair of satin slippers appeared next to her own clogs, and Elizabeth finally addressed the girl standing by her shoulder.

She was certainly beautiful. Perfectly coiled blonde ringlets draped over her shoulders like jewelry, though they did not overshadow the actual gems she wore—bright emeralds hung on her ears and around her neck, sparkling from the reflection of the flames in the fireplace. Carrying such weight was likely quite uncomfortable, but Elizabeth knew she did not mind the opportunity to flaunt her wealth. Her hands were gloved, though underneath they appeared perfectly clean and dainty, clothed in a matching white lace to the simple day dress she wore.

"It is a pleasure to meet you, miss," Elizabeth said, bending her knees into a curtsy.

"I pray that you can sew better than you dress," the girl said, bursting into silent giggles.

"Alright, Anastasia, leave her be. She comes highly recommended by Mr. Wilson," the older woman commented, causing Elizabeth's cheeks to flush. She had never imagined Mr. Wilson to be capable of complimenting someone, let alone herself.

"I require an evening gown," Anastasia snapped, smirking at Elizabeth's short jump.

"We are hosting a ball in the coming weeks," Lady Shaw further explained, expectantly waiting for a comment from Elizabeth on their wealth and abilities.

This was not missed by Elizabeth. "How marvelous. I imagine it will be wonderfully well attended."

"Oh yes, it is my coming out ball," Anastasia sighed carefreely, though Elizabeth could tell she cared very much. Her shoulders instantly resumed their hunched position, as if brought down by invisible weight that was more intense than that of her jewels.

If there was anything Elizabeth knew, it was the trends of London's societal season, and this event was far out of place. The others wouldn't be debuting themselves for several weeks. If the pace of these balls was truly going to be increasing, Mr. Wilson would only crack down harder with his expectations, and the girls would fall further apart. She could only hope that the Shaw's were just ambitious, and that they wouldn't be setting the trend for the upcoming months.

"Congratulations," she said to Anastasia, carefully placing a kind smile on her face. "Shall we begin?"

“We may,” Lady Shaw gestured to a side table in the corner of the room, where there were stacks of fabric rolls.

Elizabeth did not need to further investigate to know that the options she faced were the best she would ever have access to, and spent time running her fingers over the various options, ranging from silk and linen to velvet, damask, and brocade. She paused at the brocade, only having encountered it at one other opportunity. The luxurious texture was closely woven with various colors of silk, cotton, and metallic threads, ultimately radiating with wealth. Elizabeth wondered at the machinery, and more importantly the woman behind it, who would have created such raised designs. She hoped to acquire that level of skill one day but at present, her experience in comparison was limited.

It took a few moments before she became aware of the silence that had overtaken the room as the family watched her closely. Elizabeth cleared her throat softly before returning to her bag, which she had handed to the butler to be placed at the side table. She rummaged inside for a few moments before producing a sketchbook. The worn condition of the cover caused her to blush briefly with embarrassment, but she quickly flipped it open to find a fresh page.

“Please, sit,” she gestured to Anastasia, walking over to the richly padded bench that hugged the corner of the room.

Anastasia looked at her expectantly as Elizabeth prepared her steel pen over the parchment, prepared to note the necessary terms from their discussion.

“To meet the utmost fashion, this dress should have a fitted corset to accentuate my waist, and I would like a very full skirt that sweeps about the room. I much admire lace, so use that around the neckline and sleeves, if you will.”

Elizabeth nodded graciously, the sound of her scratching pen now filling the air. “And the color, miss?”

For this, Anastasia turned around. “What is best in season, mother?”

Lady Shaw pondered the question, chewing on her heavily lined lower lip. “Perhaps a dark blue, my dear. It will bring out your dashing eyes.”

Anastasia brought those sparkling eyes back to Elizabeth, who nodded again.

“Wonderful. I think I know what you have in mind, and I have sketched a version of it.”

She turned her sketchbook around so the others in the room could see. A smile appeared on Anastasia’s face as she looked over the imposing dress, complete with a wide skirt, draping neckline, and the appearance of lace everywhere that Elizabeth could fit.

“I approve,” she grinned, already picturing the dress in her mind, on her body.

“Allow me to take measurements of your figure, miss,” Elizabeth said, standing to find her bag once again. From this she now procured a linen tape measure.

Anastasia stood and positioned herself facing Elizabeth. In an expert manner, Elizabeth quickly used the tool to find proper numbers for parts of Anastasia’s body. Her fuller bust indeed highlighted a stunning contrast with the narrowness of her waist and hips, and her long and slender arms would allow for full appreciation of the

stylistic choices she could make. Elizabeth took more notes in her sketchbook, which she would translate into necessary measurements later at the factory.

"Now, we will determine your fabric of choice," Elizabeth explained, mentally completing her checklist for their session in her head.

"I have already determined my selection," Anastasia finished quickly. Lady Shaw nodded once in support of her daughter's boldness, a trait typically unappreciated in young women.

"Certainly," Elizabeth smiled, also in appreciation of her willingness to speak for her desires. It was not something she often saw appreciated by families, and Lady Shaw's blunt personality corroborated the way the girl had been raised. Elizabeth wondered at the qualities the other children would possess. The enormity of the home and glimpses of other possessions that could not possibly be Anastasia's had convinced her of the presence of additional children, although she would likely not meet them. Perhaps they occupied other areas of the home, taking up hobbies such as painting or archery, rather than meeting with a dressmaker and focusing so strongly on the upcoming season. Elizabeth wished she could have such freedom to pursue other hobbies, but she would never have time to spend that she could not devote to making her living. It was all she had ever known.

"What will that be?" She asked, again realizing she had drifted into the enormity of her thoughts. They could truly be captivating, at times, but otherwise distracting.

"I would like for the gown to be made of crepe and lace."

Elizabeth beamed. “Two of my favorite fabrics,” she whispered. “It can certainly be done.”

“We have a selection here,” Anastasia said, waving a careless arm to the table piled high with expensive cloth. “What is next?”

“Now, I take my leave for the afternoon, to make a toile at my workplace, according to these measurements and the alignment that the fabric will allow. I will return in the next week to fit it approximately to your figure and add detailing,” Elizabeth explained as she gathered her things.

“And you will complete the work in due time?” Lady Shaw asked from the corner, surveying Elizabeth as she walked towards the door.

Elizabeth turned to their expectant expressions. Anastasia looked strangely hopeful, her bright blue eyes alive with wonder and curiosity. Elizabeth pondered the fact that technically, she held the pressure of Anastasia’s social appearance in her hands, or rather, her tools. The dress she wore to her going out ball would be the talk of the ton for weeks, and might determine if she was an acceptable suitor to the men who attended and might eventually propose.

“Of course,” she nodded, hoping she instilled confidence in them with her demeanor.

As she left the drawing room, escorted by the kind-faced butler, she looked up again to the massive chandelier which swung in the entryway. The light catching on it was entrancing, giving the entire home a magical sense of wealth and fertility.

Adjoining the chandelier was an ornate stairwell, which curved up towards the top of the home and spread into a small balcony that provided access to various parts of the upper floor. With her eyes already drawn upwards, Elizabeth's ears perked at the sound of voices from the room above. Once tuned in, she could discern what sounded like soft sobs.

"It is of no concern, Rose," a man's voice reverberated across the high ceilings with a soothing tone.

"Sir, I shattered the dishware," a woman replied, her cries growing in intensity.

"It was old and decrepit. Truly, do not pay mind. Please fetch a broom," the man said.

Elizabeth watched as a young girl emerged from the doorway and hurried down the slender staircase, her face red and tear streaked.

The figure that emerged next to watch her go, the kind and caring man, was beautiful. The two locked eyes instantly, and Elizabeth knew that while it was not in her place to interact with him, all she wanted to do was speak with him, to stroll in the park, to learn his dreams and desires. She more strongly wanted to know his background with the servant—from what she had heard, men of his high rank never once considered the feelings of those they employed.

He returned her gaze, though his was more filled with intrigue at the dazzling woman in his doorway. Elizabeth could not look away, for his eyes sparkled just like Anastasia's, though his hair was a tousled mess of brown curls with extensive sideburns dragging down his cheeks. His cravat was crisp and done up to his neck, an

allusion Elizabeth knew was meant to give men additional height, though he did not need it. Having measured many herself, she could tell just from the length of his arms and legs that he was quite tall.

"Are you alright, miss?" The butler mused from behind her shoulder. Though he hated to disrupt their intimate moment, he could not help being aware of the tense environment the two were now a part of, though they did not know it.

"Perfectly," Elizabeth answered, dragging her eyes from his face and back down to the floor. "Thank you, sir."

The butler nodded once more as he pulled the door open. It clearly required some effort, as it appeared to be made of a thickly cut wood with brass detailing, but he did not break his stagnant expression. Elizabeth's attentive eye often focused on materials, such as fabrics and patterns, but as she wandered down the front entryway, she wanted to know most of all was who that man was, and how she could interact with him again.

CHAPTER 5

Walking in London far past the high points of selling, after the vendors had closed their stalls and trudged home, was calming. Elizabeth soaked in every moment that she could of the tranquil streets, where trash rolled along in the wind, but people were sparse. The murky smell of the Thames continued to infiltrate the air, but she knew how to ignore it, or at least place her attention elsewhere. Instead, she focused on the aromas of the pubs, of the steaming bread that baked, and the wheaty undertone of alcohol permeating from each household.

Approaching the factory, and being willing to re-enter it after feeling such freedom for the afternoon, tested Elizabeth's resolve. She looked out again at the setting sun as it removed the light from the various brick buildings and cobblestones, casting everything in darkness. The smile she wore slipped from her face as she slowly reached out to the door and pushed it open.

She had taken so long at her appointment that she missed dinner, and Mr. Wilson would not be providing her with anything that might have been left over. It was then that she was struck with an idea.

The halls were quiet as Elizabeth snuck through the damp passageway that led to the kitchen. As expected, the room was empty, though she could still envision the rising chatter and clinking of silverware for their dinner as it was consumed just hours before.

Elizabeth stepped around the table that separated the girls from the chef, a route she had never taken before, to reach the small room just behind the oven. She could hear clattering and knew the chef was puttering around, preparing herself for an evening of rest ahead on her flat cot.

With an unsteady hand, she knocked upon the wall that acted as a door and waited. There were several moments of silence, during which she hoped that the chef would not think Mr. Wilson was coming to deliver an evening reprimand. Just as she was preparing to take her leave, the chef appeared warily from around the corner, her eyes scanning Elizabeth with concern.

"May I assist you?" She asked, though the sharpness of her tone indicated that she would like to do anything but.

"Yes, I hoped that I might speak with you, freely." Elizabeth held her breath, knowing of the substantial request she was making for the woman's time.

The chef studied her, and Elizabeth did the same. The ice blue eyes that she had seen so often, assuming they were fully unkind, on a closer glance were merely blank. It was as if she would wait for an event to happen which she could react to, but with nothing occurring, they were calculated and cool. The pain she had noticed before was still prominent deep within, however.

Elizabeth then noticed that she had never seen the woman's hair down. It fell in loose, silver waves across her shoulders. She looked twenty years younger than Elizabeth was used to, and for a moment she felt a sharp pang in her heart, that she was not able to explore the world as freely as she could on her home visits. She could

imagine the kind demeanor the woman likely possessed around those she loved, somewhat akin to that of a caring grandmother, if she had family at all. But that had all been stripped away.

"If you insist," the chef said, finally stepping over the threshold that separated them.

Elizabeth celebrated silently as she followed the woman back towards the kitchen, where they both took seats on stools that rested behind the counter.

"I must begin by paying homage to the hard work you do each day," Elizabeth began. She winced internally, knowing she likely sounded odd with excessive flattery, but a glimpse of a smile had appeared on the woman's face, if not an expression of intrigue.

"It is similar to yours," the chef replied.

"I wondered if I might know your name?"

There were another few moments of silence as the chef stared at her. Clearly, this naive young woman knew of the boundaries that existed in their place of work, but what harm could it do to have her name known? Mr. Wilson certainly did not know or care.

"Martha."

"How lovely! Martha, I wondered at your past. How you entered this place of work?" Elizabeth asked her last question in a rush, the words tumbling out as if they knew how forbidden they might be.

"So, this is what you paid mind to," Martha said slowly as realization dawned.

Elizabeth could see the understanding forming in her eyes as silence dragged on. Finally, Martha pulled back the sleeve of her evening dress to reveal the tattoo. They further shared an expression of meaning as Elizabeth waited with bated breath.

"I suppose you may know, only if you acknowledge that this is to be discussed only among ourselves," Martha finally said, watching the younger woman's face.

Elizabeth smiled. "Of course."

Martha cleared her throat before beginning. "When I was young, all my family knew was hard work. I rarely saw my own father and brothers, for they spent each day working in the fields from before the sun rose to long after it had set. My mother and I earned our keep by joining them outside, helping with menial tasks, as well as various other tasks necessary to upkeep the home. We were busy and exhausted, but we were happy. That was, until the city started introducing machinery. These machines performed our work at double the speed and ability, and began to put other factories and farmers that we knew out of business. The streets grew crowded with those begging their comrades for money, for any way to get back into the workforce."

Elizabeth nodded, having heard of the post-war period that Martha had likely grown up in. People desperate for food and shelter would languish in the street in an attempt to survive, though with the risk of infection and of starvation, they often did not.

Martha continued, seemingly warming to her audience. "The day my father lost his job was frightening in our household. Suddenly, the one meant to provide had nothing. I watched as he turned into those we had often passed, now one of them,

begging in the street. And this is where I grew angry. I wanted change, and I did not want machinery.

"I had friends in my small town who had already experienced such hardship. On one summer evening, as we played in a nearby stream, we began to discuss our peril. And that is when we decided to form a league of our own, a place where we could interact with others in the same position, to fight for our way of life."

"How inspiring," Elizabeth breathed softly, fully entranced by her past.

"And so it formed. We gathered only those we trusted most and began to hold secret meetings where we discussed how to forage for food, and how to destroy the machines. We became so close that we decided to be branded for life, which is what I wear now."

Martha held her wrist higher in the air, drawing their attention to the inky mark on her wrist. It was small and simple, merely a picture of a pitchfork.

"This marks our commitment to our old way of life, without the machines. We did not need them. As more people began to lose their jobs, our league grew. And it invited those more passionate about the cause, those willing to take further steps than any of us. I grew concerned about everyone's motivations, but soon, there was nothing that I could do."

Martha paused, her eyes clouding. "One evening, a particularly angry man riled up his fellows, those who also possessed this sour feeling. And they made a decision that I deeply regretted. In the company of my own brother, they stormed a factory, and began to destroy the machines. The town was set ablaze as they pulled

apart everything they could. They caused great damage, until the police force arrived. The ensuing battle was like nothing I had ever seen. Men fighting each other, mercilessly, willing to tear their friends limb from limb. Sparks flying, machines crashing to the ground, people screaming. It was horrible."

Elizabeth imagined the chaos that could arise from enraged working men, against those employed to put a stop to their actions. She wondered who would be more passionate in the fight, and concluded that there was no method of telling—every man involved was likely battling for his family, and that alone could light a flame underneath anyone.

Martha's voice was growing thicker. "The fight went on for hours. Many lives were lost. Including that of my dear brother."

Elizabeth couldn't help gasping at this news. "I am regretfully sorry, Martha."

Martha nodded, the anguish behind her eyes finally pronounced. "It was the very next morning that I left the cause forever. I could not be a part of this act, which had taken something so dear from me. My family blamed me for our loss, and my life was never quite the same. I ran from home to find any work I could, and ended up in different kitchens and farms, each worse than the last."

The two shared a glance, Elizabeth's full of wonder and pain, Martha's ignited with a sudden passion she had not felt for a long time.

"You are part of a similar group, are you not?" Martha finally asked.

Elizabeth momentarily lost her breath. "What could you possibly mean?"

“On the same fortnight of each week, you sneak out of the factory for hours at a time. And I’ve noticed your whisperings with Florence. I see myself in you.”

“I must admit, I did not know my actions were being perceived in such a manner,” Elizabeth said softly, her admiration for the woman tripling.

“You cannot help but be observant in my field,” Martha replied knowingly.

“We are not quite ready to get tattoos,” Elizabeth began to explain. “But my story is similar to your own. I too, faced loss and anger within my family. I was exiled from my own, forced to find solace in others. And while I am grateful to have work in this factory, every single day, I feel immense anger.”

“At what?” Martha asked, gratified to finally be receiving a glimpse into the woman’s mindset. She had always wondered how the seamstresses felt about their plight. They appeared to be taking it willingly, but one could never know when unrest was brewing.

“Our treatment. Mr. Wilson runs this factory with an iron fist, and I believe it is done unfairly. I have watched him cast away women injured in the field, in this very place. He mercilessly turns them to the street when they are at their lowest, forcing them to succumb to the mercy of the elements. And it is for that reason that I have joined my own force. We protect each other. If a woman is removed from her work, we collect her, and help her to regain her position.”

Martha’s eyes shone. “That is gracious of you.”

“It is infuriating that it is necessary work. At each opportunity, we collect others to join us, to grow our cause. And one day, we will fight back.”

Martha rose abruptly, sending her stool to the floor with a loud clatter. Elizabeth, realizing the gravity of the statement she had just made, met her on her feet and grasped her hands, squeezing them tightly.

The energy in the room was suddenly electric as the women locked eyes once more. Martha was now breathing heavily. Elizabeth could tell from her clouded expression that she was reliving the factory fight of her past.

"Martha, this is your opportunity to honor your family. We are a league of strong women. We will go about this mission with grace and intellect. And we can pay tribute to your brother."

Martha swallowed with effort. "My dear, I may never be a part of something like that again."

Silence rang as Elizabeth processed this news. Here, in front of her, stood a strong, capable woman who had been a part of likely the first set of worker's protests. The things she had seen, the messages she had learned, would be invaluable to their organization. However, she was not inhumane, and could see the anguish she had caused Martha by bringing up such memories. For just a moment, she wished their titles would disappear, so she could comfort her like a true friend would.

"I understand, Martha. And I deeply apologize for inspiring such pain. Please, if you reconsider your cause, or would ever like to discuss methods for which I could be helped, please, find me."

Martha nodded. "Yes, ma'am."

Elizabeth dropped Martha's hands and slowly turned, well aware of the woman's eyes on her back as she retreated for the evening. Martha watched until she couldn't see Elizabeth anymore, and then stood for just a moment longer, looking at the empty room, wondering where she had gone wrong.

CHAPTER 6

Upon opening her eyes the next morning, Elizabeth knew that the day they had in store would not be a pleasant one. There had been predictions in the papers of a relentless heat wave, ones that only arrived every so often but could be expected to inflict turmoil. When comparing the rising temperatures of such days to the typical overcast and chilled air that London residents were accustomed to, nobody knew how to act or protect themselves. The others realized it from the same moment, feeling their sweat in their sheets, the way the air felt stale and thick.

Elizabeth pulled herself out of bed with a sigh, frustrated with the way her body already stuck to the mattress. She always worried for everyone's health, as Mr. Wilson never limited their ten-hour days or provided supplemental water for a shift that was sure to exhaust most. Workers losing consciousness while operating their machines was not an uncommon feat due to exhaustion, but it was one that increased with untrustworthy weather.

Taking her usual ice bath provided only momentary relief, but it was wonderful. Elizabeth savored the freezing water as she submerged her limbs, but once she removed herself from the tub, the air instantly stuck to her figure.

Chatter was minimal as the women walked to breakfast, each attempting to regain every ounce of energy that they could. Elizabeth braced her shoulders as she reached the beginning of the line, where Martha shoveled scoops of porridge into their bowls.

The two locked eyes, not unlike the previous night. This time, Martha's smile was subdued, yet also the most present she had ever seen. Elizabeth tried to minimize how overt her reaction was, for fear of startling the chef out of their potentially growing camaraderie. Instead, she exchanged a heartfelt expression of knowing with the other woman. Nellie looked on curiously as she followed Elizabeth to their table.

"It is a warm day today, is it not?" Nellie asked softly, hoping Elizabeth would divulge her thoughts, which were so clearly overtaking her presence of mind.

"Very warm," Elizabeth agreed absentmindedly, looking out to the rest of the room.

The girls now talked softly, commenting on their projects for the day, aligned with their concerns regarding the weather. Mr. Wilson appeared again at the balcony, surveying his miserable employees with glee. He enjoyed it when they felt the true pain of their work. It reminded him of his youth, where he had been pushed to his breaking point in every single shift in his father's factory. The man was relentless in his desire for his son to perform, and had scheduled him practically nonstop, on many warm days such as this, without a second glance.

"Let's begin," he called out, feeling frustrated at the waste of time the girls took such advantage of. They didn't know how well they had it.

The women below sighed with the sound of Mr. Wilson's grating voice as it again filled the air, but begrudgingly walked their dishes to the vat of water. Martha did not notice Elizabeth as she walked by, but Elizabeth took note of the sag in the woman's shoulders while she moved dishes to the back of the room, where she would

spend the afternoon washing them in tandem with preparing the worker's second meal of the day.

As expected, the factory room itself was stifling. Elizabeth wiped a bead of sweat from her brow as she approached her workspace, again thankful that it was not in her position to facilitate the use of machines. Despite this, she looked on with worried eyes as the others walked towards their stations, powering up their space for the day. Since the introduction of power to their workspace, the speed with which they could output materials had doubled, although the learning curve was in itself significant.

She recalled the way the girls had struggled to adjust to life with the machinery, as they were able to move with a mind of their own. The battle for control was not a simple or easy one and had resulted in a few lost limbs for the women. Elizabeth was convinced it was due to Mr. Wilson's carelessness in teaching them, leaving many unsure of how to properly use the masses of steel. This frightened others out of their profession, though their new position of begging on the streets was not one that anyone envied, either.

Elizabeth pulled her sketchbook out of her bag, prepared to look over the measurements she had taken of Anastasia, when she felt a tap on her shoulder. She turned to see Nellie standing over her shoulder with a worried expression.

"What is the matter?" She asked, her own concern instantly present.

"I have worries for Jane." Nellie's voice trembled while naming their friend.

Jane was newly employed to the factory, and had faced her own battles in adjusting to a working life. Her father's recent passing had boosted her, as the eldest daughter, to a position of caregiving for her family, which was unusual. Elizabeth knew Jane was not intended for such a rigorous schedule, and that she would perform better in a home, taking care of her own children. Elizabeth looked to the power loom that she knew Jane was managing for the day to see the young girl fighting with the shuttle.

With a final tug that seemed to exert her energy, she was able to pull it down, but Elizabeth noticed the tremor in her legs as she stepped away.

"I feel she should rest for the day," Nellie suggested.

"Allow me to speak with her." Elizabeth rose from her station and strode to the other side of the room.

Up close, the girl looked worse for wear. Her face was flushed, far more intensely than it should have been for not having begun work yet. Her eyes crossed as she looked at Elizabeth with muddled intrigue.

"I believe it would be in your best interest to spend the day in bed," Elizabeth suggested gently, now understanding Nellie's concern.

It was as if she had asked the girl for her right arm. "I cannot."

Elizabeth turned helplessly to look at Nellie, but was instead met with the cruel face of Mr. Wilson, who suddenly stood directly behind her.

"What is this?" He sneered.

Elizabeth swallowed, knowing she needed to stand her ground. “I believe Jane should rest for the day. This heat is dangerous, and she has not yet experienced it.”

Mr. Wilson’s eyes filled with rage at the request. He took a careful look at Jane’s swaying figure before replying coldly. “She is standing, so she is fit for work. How dare you suggest she take a break? That is unheard of.”

Elizabeth turned to Jane, who was nodding slowly. “I am ready to work, sir.”

“As I thought,” Mr. Wilson stated dryly, before turning on his heel and walking away.

Elizabeth felt dread in her chest as she too returned to her workstation, but there was not much she herself could do to prevent the situation. Nellie, having understood the gravity of the interaction that took place, trudged back to her own machine, her body fueled with contempt.

Elizabeth shook herself out of her worries, knowing she needed to be productive to fulfill Anastasia Shaw’s order. The measurements she had taken allowed for an ideal dress design, and with that Elizabeth was pleased. She hummed to herself as she began to design the toile, which she hoped would fit perfectly to Anastasia’s body. If she created the under piece correctly, she would be able to add the necessary fabric in the home, rather than returning once again to the factory for adjustments. The day passed quickly with her feverish working pace. At times, she did not even hear the grinding background noise that the machines constantly produced. With her persistence, she came quite close to stitching together the test garment, which she suspected would fit Anastasia quite well.

The darkness of the room was one of the only methods of reference the women could reference to signal the end of the working day, as the sun set. While a few candles clung to the corners of the room, they relied on the overhead windows of daylight to see each day. It was once she could no longer see her fabric that Elizabeth resigned herself to the fact that her work was completed for the time being. With just a few hours of work the following day, she would complete the piece.

The women chattered gratefully as they strode back towards the kitchen for their meal. Elizabeth noticed the sweat that had accumulated in the backs of their dresses, as each had fought the heat of the day to be productive with their work. Her own muscles and mind certainly felt fatigued, and so at the presence of her evening meal, she was exceedingly grateful.

The women consumed their food in silence, each enjoying the opportunity to regain their energy. As they reached the end and plates were scraped clean, chatter gradually rose.

Elizabeth turned to a soft tap on her shoulder, where Nellie once again stood. The expression on her face was one of immense concern, so much so that Elizabeth rose to meet her eyes.

“Jane did not appear for supper,” Nellie said, the youthfulness of her expression betraying her seemingly calm demeanor.

Elizabeth felt a shudder down to her muscles, which already ached exceedingly.

“Let us look for her.” She hoped the fear she felt had not infiltrated her voice, but the way it shook indicated that it might have.

The two walked back to the factory room, now silent but still exceedingly warm. Elizabeth’s heart rate quickened as she crossed the room to Jane’s station.

And there, lying sprawled out at the base of the machine, was a motionless figure.

Elizabeth’s speed quickened to a run until she was at the girl’s side. When a pat on her shoulder initiated no movement, Elizabeth reached over her shoulder to turn Jane’s body.

The girl’s face was flushed but showed no signs of consciousness. With trembling fingers, Elizabeth reached to her chest to feel for a heartbeat.

Nellie watched on with worried eyes, but took an involuntary step back at the ashy expression Elizabeth wore as she turned to face her.

“Jane has passed.”

FULL OUTLINE

Chapter 1:

In this chapter, the main character, Elizabeth Reynolds, is introduced as an employee in a textile factory located in Windsor, England. The time period is 1843, and the women working are treated terribly by their overseer, John Wilson. Other minor characters are introduced, including Nellie, a young girl at the age of 9 who is like a sister to Elizabeth, and Mary, a bitter colleague who resents her job. Further details about the women's interactions with their machinery, tasks for each day, and attitude towards their societal position are included. Mr. Wilson slaps one of the workers, Josephine, in a showing of brutal violence. Elizabeth also notices a peculiar tattoo on the arm of their factory chef.

Chapter 2:

Elizabeth sneaks out of the factory in the evening to attend a secret meeting for her society, the Women's Equal Rights Group. Various seamstresses from different towns share their completed objectives in line with the group's mission, which involve recruiting more members, spreading their word, and gaining evidence of their unjust treatment.

Chapter 3:

Background is provided into Elizabeth's past, including the senseless violence inflicted upon her by her father. At the factory, Elizabeth is tasked by Mr. Wilson with

traveling to Anastasia Shaw's home, a wealthy woman in the area, to design a dress for her.

Chapter 4:

At the massive Shaw estate, Elizabeth meets the family, which includes the rude daughter, Anastasia, and the commanding mother, Lady Shaw. She takes measurements for the dress. Upon leaving, she overhears an intriguing conversation of an attractive man who sparks her interest.

Chapter 5:

Once she returns to the factory for the evening, Elizabeth sneaks into the kitchen to meet with the chef, Martha. She asks about the woman's tattoo, which is a picture of a pitchfork. Martha shares about her past, involving an abusive household, her membership in a civil rights group, and an ensuing worker's riot which resulted in the death of her brother. Elizabeth attempts to convince her to join her present-day justice group, but Martha refuses.

Chapter Six:

The next day brings about an intense heat wave, which is unusual for London's climate. The women work hard and grow exhausted, including Elizabeth, who spends the day completing an undergarment piece for Anastasia. Once the day is finished, they take their evening meal, at which point Nellie alerts Elizabeth to the fact that

Jane, a girl that Elizabeth tried to stop from working due to the heat earlier in the day, is missing. The two discover Jane's lifeless body in the factory room.

Chapter Seven:

The shock of Jane's passing frightens some and infuriates others. Mr. Wilson, who encouraged Jane to work despite her poor health, refuses to accept blame for her death. Elizabeth coordinates a small funeral, and gives a riling speech to the women, finally exposing the society she and Florence, another woman at their factory, are a part of. Some express their interest in joining, but Elizabeth and Mary engage in a fight over the correct way to handle the situation.

Chapter Eight:

Now riled with passion, Elizabeth finishes Anastasia's undergarment and returns to the Shaw house. She fits Anastasia, who complains of her rigorous social schedule. Elizabeth finally snaps, reprimanding Anastasia for her greed. As Anastasia prepares to respond, the man that Elizabeth had spotted before enters the room and protects her. Elizabeth quickly leaves the estate, fearing for her position.

Chapter Nine:

This is the first insight into the dynamics of the Shaw household. Anastasia and the man, revealed to be Malcolm Shaw, argue over Elizabeth. Lord and Lady Shaw enter the room and discover what has occurred. Malcolm urges them to let her return to

finish his sister's dress, and for him to request a design of his own. There is another fight between Malcolm and his brother, Vincent, over appropriate societal expectations and their power struggle within the family, as Vincent is older but less respected.

Chapter Ten:

Elizabeth is called into Mr. Wilson's office, where he scolds her for her actions, but instructs her to return to the home. Elizabeth timidly returns and completes Anastasia's piece. The family is satisfied with her work, and as she prepares to leave, Malcolm emerges. The two converse for the first time, where Malcolm places his request for a suit for the upcoming ball.

Chapter Eleven:

It is time for another meeting of the civil rights society. Elizabeth has managed to convince five others from her factory in addition to herself to attend. Clara, the woman in charge, is pleased at their high attendance. Elizabeth shares the hardship they have experienced with Jane's passing, which riles the women into taking more direct action. Elizabeth returns home for the evening to practice her penmanship, as she insightfully realizes it might soon become useful.

Chapter Twelve:

Elizabeth returns to the Shaw home the following day to fit Malcolm for his suit. While Lady Shaw oversees the interaction, she is momentarily called away, leaving the two alone. Malcolm recognizes Elizabeth's distress and exhaustion and invites her into conversation. Elizabeth candidly shares her sorrows regarding Jane, and the two share a private moment, unaware that they are being watched by Vincent.

Chapter Thirteen:

Back at the factory, the introduction of London's social season encourages even more work. Elizabeth witnesses Mr. Wilson slapping another female worker over a mistake, and her rage grows. In a fit of anger, she decides that she can trust Malcolm with her troubles and composes a note about their treatment that she fits into his undergarment.

Chapter Fourteen:

That same day, the focus shifts to Malcolm, who escapes his family home to attend his own civil rights group, this time composed of men and women workers in the area. Malcolm is an outsider, as he has plenty of money, but conceals his reputation due to his passion for the cause.

Chapter Fifteen:

Elizabeth returns to the Shaw home and continues fitting Malcolm. She and Anastasia share a tense moment, but she successfully passes him the note. Once she leaves,

Malcolm reads it, and realizes that they have the same intentions. He plots how he can work with her on the cause.

Chapter Sixteen:

Upon returning to the factory, Elizabeth is told that another girl, Lillie, has been discovered dead in her bed, having conducted extra hours of a shift the previous night. Elizabeth is furious, but also devastated. She holds yet another funeral, this time less attended, as the other women are now afraid to not complete their own work for the day. Elizabeth feels isolated and afraid.

Chapter Seventeen:

During her next fitting with Malcolm, Elizabeth is notably depressed. Malcolm has composed a note of his own, which he slips into her bag as she leaves the fitting. Elizabeth discovers that it is a request for the two to meet in the park the following evening.

Chapter Eighteen:

Night arrives, and Elizabeth takes the risk of heading to the park. Malcolm also arrives, and the two engage in a long discussion of their concerns regarding the factory. Elizabeth shares about the death of Lillie, and Malcolm about his own civil rights group. They make plans for future meetings, unaware again that they are being watched by Vincent.

Chapter Nineteen:

The next morning, Malcolm confronts his father about his work. It is revealed that the Shaw family owns and operates the very factory that Elizabeth works in. Malcolm urges his father to fire Mr. Wilson, but cannot explain why, as it would indicate his close relationship with Elizabeth. Furious with his family's injustice, Malcolm again meets with his tradesmen friends, urging them to consider joining with the women for the cause. They are not enthused by the idea of collaborating with females, however. This time, he is openly followed by Vincent.

Chapter Twenty:

Malcolm, upon seeing Vincent's presence at his private meeting, confronts his brother. Vincent reveals that he is aware of Malcolm's consortium with Elizabeth, and that he intends to tell their father. In a battle to return home first, the two fight. Vincent gravely injures Malcolm and leaves him to die.

Chapter Twenty-One:

At work the following day, Elizabeth is called to Mr. Wilson's office. Mr. Wilson reveals that he has been informed of her inappropriate relationship with Malcolm. Rather than firing her, however, he says that he has been instructed to keep her working by the family, but to increase her hours. The meeting ends with Mr. Wilson beating Elizabeth, to the point where she can barely stand, and forcing her to return to her station.

Chapter Twenty-Two:

Elizabeth's disheveled appearance has now caught the eye of several of her coworkers, and Martha, who all agree to join the cause. Elizabeth brings them to her civil rights group, and according to the plan that she and Malcolm had created, convinces them to follow her to a secret location, where he has promised to bring his own tradesmen. Upon arrival at the location, however, Malcolm is nowhere to be found. It is instead Vincent who emerges from the shadows.

Chapter Twenty-Three:

Elizabeth has not yet seen Vincent and thinks that he is another man who is involved in the cause. Vincent follows along with the ruse. He listens in on their meeting, where Elizabeth expresses her concern for Malcolm's disappearance. Vincent shares that he has a close relationship with Malcolm, and that he knows Malcolm's whereabouts. Elizabeth agrees to travel with Vincent to find Malcolm and sends the other women back to the factory.

Chapter Twenty-Four:

Mr. Wilson is at the Shaw home, meeting with Lord Shaw. The two discuss their convoluted business plan, where Mr. Wilson has been enforcing strict labor regulations that do not meet any codes, but which have been earning Lord Shaw additional funds that he has been siphoning from his family. The two agree that they must hire more female workers to replace the two who have recently passed.

Chapter Twenty-Five:

Back at the factory, Nellie is concerned at Mr. Wilson's and Elizabeth's prolonged absence. She takes it upon herself to bravely sneak into Mr. Wilson's office and finds one of his secret workbooks hidden in a drawer. Inside the book, she finds an extensive list of names, which spans over two different pages with various dates. The two names at the end of the list are Jane and Lillie, leading her to believe that they are the casualties that Mr. Wilson has caused in his time as overseer. She tells the other women, who grow exceedingly angry and join forces to find Elizabeth, led by Martha.

Chapter Twenty-Six:

Elizabeth and Vincent travel far into the woods, where Elizabeth slowly begins to realize that Vincent is not to be trusted. He reveals his own plan, where he will take Elizabeth to a factory of his own. His father has not trusted him thus far with any business operations, and he wants to prove that with one strong worker and crueler business models, he can double their output. Elizabeth attempts to escape, but Vincent threatens her with Malcolm's life, promising that he will return her to him if she complies.

Chapter Twenty-Seven:

Malcolm has finally awoken from his near-death experience to find himself in the care of Clara, the woman who runs Elizabeth's labor rights group. Upon discovering him in the empty factory while on a mission to recruit more women, she brought him back to

her home for treatment. As the two begin to talk, they realize that they both know Elizabeth. Malcolm and Clara run to the factory to find her, realizing that she might be in danger from Vincent.

Chapter Twenty-Eight:

When the two arrive at the factory, they learn that Elizabeth and Mr. Wilson are both missing. Malcolm explains who Vincent is, and the women realize that Elizabeth has gone with him. Malcolm is panicked, wondering what his brother will do with the woman that he realizes he loves, and returns home, instructing the women to wait for his word.

Chapter Twenty-Nine:

Malcolm confronts his father once again, this time boldly revealing the extent of his relationship with Elizabeth, and his concerns at Vincent's actions. He discovers that his father and Mr. Wilson have been meeting and consorting on how to earn more money without caring for their employee's health, resulting in the recent deaths. Lord Shaw reflects that Vincent might have adopted his own business practices and recalls a conversation the two had over Vincent's future, in which he declared that he would be opening his own business. Malcolm realizes that he knows exactly where Vincent is and takes his leave.

Chapter Thirty:

Malcolm returns to the factory to round up the women, telling them that he knows where Vincent and Elizabeth are. He tells them to give him a few hours of advance time to find her before they follow and makes his way to the abandoned factory where he and Vincent used to imagine having a business together. When he enters the factory, he finds Vincent.

Chapter Thirty-One:

The two engage in a verbal argument over Elizabeth and their father's factory. Vincent attempts to explain his own intentions, and how he will better the business opportunities the two could have, but Malcolm will hear none of it, and demands to know where Elizabeth is. Vincent refuses to reveal her whereabouts, leading the two to fight. Malcolm is still weakened from his fight with Vincent, and is on the verge of losing once again, when he experiences a surge of motivation upon hearing Elizabeth's cries from the lower cellar.

Chapter Thirty-Two:

Malcolm overpowers Vincent in a move that takes the last of his energy, and makes his way down to Elizabeth, who was locked in the lower cellar. The two reunite, just as the women burst into the room, not having trusted Malcolm to overpower Vincent.

Chapter Thirty-Three:

As everyone reunites, Vincent arises from the floor and grabs Nellie. There is an ensuing standoff as the group urges him to release her, but he refuses, and slits her throat. Nellie collapses and dies as Vincent makes his escape. In a fit of rage, Malcolm follows and strikes his brother down, effectively killing him.

Chapter Thirty-Four:

The women carry Nellie's body to a field outside of the city and hold a burial service, which Malcolm and Clara both participate in. They then rally both of their civil rights groups to hold a large group meeting, at which Florence presents Mr. Wilson's book with the names of the deceased girls, originally discovered by Nellie. The women bring the book to the police, who arrest Mr. Wilson, and subsequently Lord Shaw, for treason.

Chapter Thirty-Five:

Grateful to be freed from his family's clutches, Malcolm takes over the operation of the factory, and uses his family funds to purchase new beds and clothes for the women. He also provides new food for Martha to cook with, while raising her wages. The story concludes with the women accepting a new set of orders from the town. Elizabeth sews Nellie's name into the undergarment of her first order.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

FICTION NOVELS

MacLean, S.G. *The Black Friar*. Great Britain, Quercus Editions Ltd, 2017.

In this fiction installment of MacLean's mystery series, Damian Seeker, Captain of Oliver Cromwell's guard, must take down a group of religious fanatics (Fifth Monarchists, and previous followers of Cromwell) as they plot rebellion. In the midst of his efforts, a body that has been preserved in robes fit for a Dominican friar has been discovered in the Black Friars, and Seeker must find those who have murdered the man that he recognizes. The story takes place in London, 1655, setting up a plot that involves murder, political unrest, and cases of missing children.

This novel had many different aspects that proved useful to my own research and writing, from its explanations of Parliamentary powers and royal abilities, as Seeker faces Royalists and the Republic, to religious motivations and groups. I used this information and historical context, but also strategies that MacLean employed to build complex characters such as Seeker—we witness him in love, and the conflict that occurs when it interferes with his work, and how he handles facing dissenters from every direction. I also valued how the novel wove various storylines into one, focusing on the missing children, political unrest, Royalist spies, and other characters into one complete narrative. This is a strategy that I will continue to emulate in my own work, as I find such tales to be sufficient in creating the most realistic journeys for their detectives.

McElwain, Julie. *A Murder In Time.* New York, Pegasus Crime, 2016.

This science and historical fiction novel features Kendra Donovan, a talented FBI agent who goes rogue after a disastrous mission. In her pursuit of the guilty attacker, Donovan stumbles through the hallway of Aldrich Castle, to come out on the other side in 1815. Mistaken for a lady's maid, she is on the castle grounds when the body of a young woman is discovered. Lacking both twenty-first century tools and her official status as an investigator, Donovan works to find the killer.

This unique plot organization proved extremely beneficial to my own storytelling. By inserting a character in a new environment, hundreds of years out of her depth, McElwain was able to subtly provide context of the Regency Era by having other characters explain aspects of their lives. McElwain included information that can often be overlooked, such as the lack of hangers (due to them being commercialized in 1869), differing titles for wealthy characters, powdered toothpaste, smells such as lemon, linseed oil, and beeswax, conversations regarding astronomy, and other niche details that brought the setting to life. I found that I conducted my own research to include small snippets of information such as this to help develop my own setting.

Raybourn, Deanna. *A Grave Robbery*. New York, Berkley, 2024.

In this fiction installment of Raybourn's Victorian mystery series, partners Veronica Speedwell, a historian and lepidopterist, and Stoker Revelstoke Templeton-Vane, a taxidermist, work with a mannequin that turns out to be a perfectly preserved young woman. Taking place in London, 1889, the story follows the pair as they visit

underground laboratories, a traveling circus, and the world of undertakers to investigate the crime.

Raybourn's setting, and the context provided to create it, informed my own writing in a multitude of ways. In each chapter, the author wove in miniscule but necessary details that concerned not only the location but also gender stereotypes, occupations, societal expectations, clothing, and more that immersed the reader into Victorian London. Techniques included varying speech patterns, describing the belongings of each character, valuing the gender and experience of each character with a focus on how it influenced their role, and ultimately creating an environment that closely replicated the period. I used these methods and the author's information provided to navigate my own historical novel.

HISTORICAL STUDIES

Edwards, Martin. *The Life of Crime: Detecting the History of Mysteries and Their Creators.* London, Collins Crime Club, 2022.

This novel traces the evolution of the crime fiction genre from the eighteenth century to the present, providing readers with a comprehensive outline of its growth. Edwards also explores the events that shape the lives of various authors, such as World War II, which spun innocent murder tales into vicious and unforgiving stories—the result of authors who experienced the horrors of war now unafraid to write truthfully. The book is split into 55 chapters, each of which cover specific examples and authors of specific crime writing.

With Edwards' detailed explorations of so many genres and authors, such as The Great Detective, Female Detectives, Locked Rooms, etc; I developed a deeper understanding of the evolution of mystery writing. This information helped to inform my own development of how the genre has progressed, as I was able to pinpoint specific installments in each genre that demonstrate the evolution of culture. These installments, which I further researched independently, proved vital in forming a foundation for my synopsis.

Flanders, Judith. *The Invention of Murder: How the Victorians Revelled in Death and Detection and Created Modern Crime*. New York, Thomas Dunne Books, 2011.

This research-based book studies 19th century Victorian society in Great Britain and how murder cases both incited fear but also posed as sensation and entertainment. To develop her studies, Flanders explores famous and obscure murders, and their representations in newspapers, ballads, plays, and penny-bloods. These portrayals led to the development of crime fiction, which introduced readers to necessary elements of crime such as police forces and investigations.

Flanders' method of organizing the book involved describing a crime (murder), exposing the killer, following their conviction, and then covering all the ways that the crime was publicized. This method allows me to track how crimes of different years, as I mainly used the context she provided for my Victorian study, changed both due to cultural contexts and media-based outlets. I utilized this information to help develop

the evolution of crime, how violent deaths impacted popular culture, and how they were portrayed to the public during the 19th century.

Symons, Julian. *Bloody Murder: The Classic Crime Fiction Reference Fully Revised and Updated.* London, Pan Books Ltd, 1994.

Symons published over thirty crime novels and story collections between 1945 and 1994; his 1972 edition of *Bloody Murder* is one of the best-known critical works in the field of crime fiction. Revised editions were published in 1985, 1992, and 1994 to keep stories included relevant. His work distinguished between the classic puzzle-based mystery and the more modern "crime novel" that focuses on psychology and motivation. The development of crime fiction and its standing in the literary genre is explored in great detail, with studies of mystery authors (until the 90s) included, and his opinions on their success and shortfalls.

This novel provides a critical analysis and comprehensive outline of authors in the mystery genre, and includes information that I conceptualized in terms of historical crime fiction evolution. In providing information on such a variety of authors, Symons also supplies a very detailed analysis of the features of each genre, and how they are developed both in historical contexts and the literary world. I used his research to help shape my own understanding of the different genres and authors who played a role in each.

ADDITIONAL PUBLICATIONS

Rotondi, Jessica Pearce. “Five Secret Societies That Have Remained Shrouded in Mystery.” *History*, 15 April 2025. https://www.history.com/articles/secret-societies-freemasons-knights-templar

History.com is an American pay television network and flagship channel that employs a wide range of authors and editors to produce heavily reviewed and informative content. This research-based article details different secret societies of the past, providing context about their origins, followers, significance in history, and more. The societies included are the Knights Templar, the Freemasons, the Illuminati, Skull and Bones, and Bilderberg. Including such a wide range of organizations that span different geological regions and time periods is significant and demonstrates the strength that these cults can have on any public.

As I planned to center my historical crime novel around a secret society, it was crucial that I develop an understanding of how these organizations can play a role in any society, but namely those in different historical contexts. Learning about the organizations also supplied ideas regarding the motivations that members may have to join, and how the leaders viewed their followers. I gained insight into different symbols and how their value was placed differently in these objects and teachings, all of which inspired my own work. It was also valuable to see how the type of organization depended on the historical context it existed in.

Spence, Richard B. “The Real History of Secret Societies.” The Great Courses. https://www.library.pima.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2020/09/Real-History-of-Secret-Societies-8680.pdf

This course guidebook was constructed by Professor Richard B. Spence, who holds a PhD in History, at the University of Idaho for his course that dives into how secret societies operated and how they have influenced history (including religion, politics, and popular culture), from the past to the present. The textbook explores various stories of those involved in cults, how they originated, what life might have been like for those involved, and their role in society. Significant groups included are the Blackburn Cult, the Knights Templar, the Freemasons, and the Illuminati, the Mafia, and events such as Bloody Sunday.

While reading these accounts, I was inspired in many different ways for the context and setting of my own secret society within my fictional outline. Events such as the mysterious death of Jean Coutrot, who died under suspicious circumstances and was found to possess a Revolutionary Pact that claimed to be a manifesto of a secret society, inspired ideas for the motivations and aims of the society I created. I used other information included, such as historical context, symbolism, and political details to help craft other aspects of the society.

FIELD RESEARCH

Ullman, Lauren. *My Research Conducted in the New York Genealogical and Biographical Society Collection.* New York Public Library, August 2024.

While at the New York Public Library in the summer prior to my senior year, I purposefully visited the Irma and Paul Milstein Division of United States History, Local History and Genealogy. This collection houses documents that trace the development of New York city and its peoples, encompassing registers, photographs, notes, name origins, and more that provide a holistic representation of family history.

I took the time to explore various folders for material sources within the New York Genealogical and Biographical Society Collection, such as the Prentice Family Files, the Genealogy of the Prince Family, correspondences of the Prince Family, and Pulver Family Notes. Within each of these files were letters, narratives, and history, all of which informed my thinking for my own historical piece. The authentic writing of these families, dating from 1736 to 1935, afforded insight into their ways of thinking, and inspired descriptions that I later used.

Kendra, April. *Informational Interview.* University of Delaware, November 2024.

To interact with an expert in the field, I participated in a meeting with my thesis director, Professor McCabe, and Dr. April Kendra, an Associate Professor at the University of Delaware. Professor Kendra has performed extensive research and teachings on the construction and reception of popular genres, is drafting her own historical novel, and has also spent time in London, England, the setting for my novel.

Within this meeting, Professor Kendra shared invaluable knowledge regarding the methods that she has found most useful to create her own text. We also discussed London at length, as she recommended various sites and activities to explore, including the Thames River Police museum, Hyde Park, Lyceum Theater, St. Bride's Church, Guild Hall, Charles Dickens' house, the London library, and more. She also discussed authors and their projects at length, such as Eleanor Marks', who created societies to help workers learn to read, and Wilkie Collins. While abroad, I consulted my notes according to Professor Kendra, and made an effort to visit the sites she had suggested, which proved useful.

Ullman, Lauren. *Winter Session Literature of London Trip.* London, England, February 2025.

During the winter session of 2025, I participated in the London, England literary abroad trip. The course, titled Literature of London, explored fiction, plays, and poetry composed across different historical periods, involving authors with varied backgrounds who wrote in and about the city of London. These studies allowed for our class to immerse ourselves in the culture, history, and literary traditions that have thrived in the city, offering a unique perspective on societal evolution.

As I had previously planned to set my historical novel in London, this trip was extremely insightful. Each day in the city was spent critically—I paid careful attention to the historical locations we visited, noting information about the past, how the buildings were composed, what they were used for, and the role they had played in the

overall cultural narrative. There were a few locations that were especially significant, including the Sherlock Holmes museum, which, in its careful composure of a home exact to the novels, allowed for me to visualize my own setting while exploring that which the famous detective had lived in; the Docklands Museum, where we learned of 400 years of history situated on the Thames, a feature in my own text; the London Bridge and Tower of London, both historically significant sites in which I learned about architecture and ways of life; and the British Museum, filled with artifacts that represented London across various eras.

ADDITIONAL WORKS CONSULTED

Creating a historical text situated in London in the 1840s required extensive research into the manner of speaking, clothing, professions, and societal connotations of the era. More intricate details, such as methods of washing, lighting, tattoo etiquette, machinery, pubs, are researched in short-term fashion, but require appropriate fact-checking to ensure everything is accurately represented. This is research that I will continue to conduct as I work on completing my novel.

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