

Hudson's Kill

ALSO BY PADDY HIRSCH

The Devil's Half Mile

Hudson's Kill

PADDY  HIRSCH



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To cousin Michael.
For your faith, your strength, and your inspiration.

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Hudson's Kill

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NEW YORK
September 1803

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ONE



Saturday

Kerry O'Toole pushed the big iron key into the brass lock of the African Free School, and jiggled it back and forth. The lock was new and poorly set, and the key needed finessing before it turned properly. John Teasman, the headmaster, had ordered the lock fitted a week earlier, after a lumberyard owned by a black man named Bonsel was burned to the ground. Fires were not uncommon in New York in 1803—the city was still made mostly of wood, and accidents happened—but everyone was saying that the fire that put Bonsel out of business was different. The Irish, black, and American nativist gangs were all struggling for control of what they considered to be their quarters of the city. And they were becoming more brazen and violent by the day. The African Free School was on Cliff Street, in the old Dutch district, and while it was endowed by some of the wealthiest and most powerful families in New York, it was still a Negro business in a neighborhood claimed by the nativists. Teasman wasn't taking any chances.

Kerry twisted the key, and the tongue of the lock slid home.

The sound of a bell made its way up the street. She turned to the little girl in the long brown dress standing beside her. "How many chimes was that, Rosie?"

Two big, hazel eyes looked back. Rosie Tully's fine, dark hair was tied back in two pigtails. She held up five fingers on one hand and one on the other.

"Six bells. Very good. Now, shall we see if we can find a cab?"

Rosie's pigtails bounced.

Cliff Street was empty, but the sound of laughing and singing filtered up from the waterfront, just three blocks away. Kerry took a last look at the façade of the school, to be sure all the windows were closed. She slipped the

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heavy iron key into the pocket of her dress and touched the hilt of the long-bladed boning knife she kept there. She took the child by the hand.

Rosie was the youngest daughter of Tamsin and Seamus Tully, who owned Hughson's Tavern on the North River waterfront. They often asked Kerry to mind their youngest on busy days. And Saturdays were always busy. Kerry would go to the tavern for a late luncheon, then take Rosie to the African Free School. Rosie would look at the pictures in the books and pamphlets while Kerry prepared her lessons for the following week. They would read together for a while, and then go home to Kerry's house.

The little girl skipped ahead, tugging Kerry's hand, and Kerry felt her throat close up.

Rosie slowed, and looked up at her with solemn eyes. Kerry smiled and squeezed her hand. She shifted her thoughts. How many women in this city had lost an infant child, to disease, fever, or cold? She was more fortunate than most. She had lost, but she had gained, too. When her own child had died, three years before, her future had looked empty. It was bad enough that she was the daughter of an Irish gangster and a runaway slave. Times were changing, but mixed-race children were generally assumed to be the offspring of black prostitutes and their white clients. They had few prospects for marriage or choice of career. Servant. Thief. Whore. Kerry had made her way as a pick-pocket for a while when she was younger, so, when Daniel died, she was on the point of throwing herself back into the cesspools of the city. But Justy Flanagan had pulled her back. He had helped her to read and write and try another path. And everything had changed.



There were no cabs, and when they reached Beekman Street every hansom that passed was occupied. So they kept walking, up the shallow hill to Chatham Row and around the Park. They crossed the Broad Way, traversing the spine of Manhattan Island, and walked down into the New Town. The heels of Kerry's boots clicked on the uneven cobbles, and she had to tread carefully to avoid turning an ankle. Landowners were throwing up townhouses and tenements as immigrants flooded into the city and demand soared. But the buildings here were thin-walled and rickety, the streets poorly paved. Most of the street lanterns in the area had been stolen, and those that remained were rarely lit.

The evening light threw long shadows in the lanes, and Kerry could feel

HUDSON'S KILL

the eyes on her, watching from dark windows and doors. This part of the city was still neutral territory, too far uptown for the nativists, and too new for the blacks or the Irish. Families were still moving in. But it wouldn't be long before the population settled. And then the gangs would stake their claims and the fighting would start.

Even then, she would still be safe enough. Her father was O'Toole, the bloody right hand of the Bull, who controlled the East River waterfront and the Irish gangs. And her cousin was Lew Owens, whose heavy-handed enforcers took a piece of every business run by someone with colored skin, from brothels to bakeries. Everyone who lived in this part of New York knew who Kerry O'Toole was, and if they did not, if they had just recently arrived in the city and mistook her for a soft mark, the long, thin blade in her pocket would set them straight.

They walked on, towards the north end of the town. Kerry lived with her cousin, in a tiny, two-room cottage in the rear of an enormous compound, bigger than any house in the old Dutch quarter on the tip of Manhattan. It was nearly impossible for a black man to buy property in the city, but Lew Owens had persuaded a lawyer to do the conveyancing for him, and he was now one of the few Negro landowners in New York. The compound was well-sited, at the cusp of the new developments and the ramshackle shanties of Canvas Town, where most of the city's free Negroes lived, and Owens' gang held sway.

A light onshore breeze blew up the hill. It carried the stench of woodsmoke, roasting meat, and open latrines. Chapel Street narrowed further, hemmed in by a high brick wall and a row of rickety wooden tenements, divided by deep, narrow alleyways. The street had not yet been paved, and Kerry could feel the dampness of the ground through the leather soles of her shoes.

There was a mewling sound. Rosie stopped and looked up at Kerry, huge hazel eyes, her fingers in her mouth.

Kerry smiled. "Was that a kitty-cat?"

The soft whimper came again, floating out of one of the alleys. Kerry peered into the darkness. She felt the hair rising on the nape of her neck.

Rosie's eyes were like saucers. Kerry bent to pick her up. "Don't be scared."

Her heart thumped. She took the knife out of her pocket. She balanced Rosie on her left hip and shuffled down the alley, the blade held out in front of her.

Nothing moved in the gloom. She stopped halfway down the narrow

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passageway, feeling the pulse in her temples, waiting for her eyes to adjust. Slowly, she began to make out a shape, crumpled on the ground, wedged into a niche in the wall. She edged closer, and saw it was a girl, wrapped in a kind of thin shroud, lying on her side. One of her shoes had come off, and the sole of her foot was pale in the dim light.

Kerry went down on one knee. She slipped the knife back into her pocket, and eased Rosie gently off her hip. Her heart was pounding. She tried to keep her voice steady.

"Look away, now." She turned Rosie to face the mouth of the alley. And then she turned back.

The girl on the ground was shivering, her eyes closed, her face wet with sweat. She whimpered again, the voice catching with pain, like rust on a blade. Kerry touched the girl's face. She was pale and freezing cold, and Kerry knew instantly that she had been cut somewhere, and that all the blood had poured out of her. She pulled the shroud back to see.

"Oh, Jesus."

The girl had been cut from her breastbone to her pubis, a long, smooth gash that had opened her up and let her entrails spill out onto the ground. Her arms were dark with blood, crossed over her abdomen, loosely cradling what was left of her belly. Her guts glistened, white against her dark skin. Kerry rocked back on her heels, bile burning the back of her throat. "Jesus. Sweet Jesus Christ."

The girl's eyes flickered open. They seem to look right through her. She muttered something, and tensed, as though she was hugging herself tighter. Kerry dropped to her knees in the mud and wrapped her arm around the girl's shoulders. She pulled her close, but there was only a halting sound, as though the girl was trying to catch her breath. And then, nothing.

Kerry grabbed Rosie up and hurried back to the street. She ran back along the puddled lane and up to the Broad Way. Two watchmen were ambling up the shallow hill, talking quietly to each other, swinging their long clubs. Kerry ran to them, Rosie clutched tight to her chest.

"Whoah there, missy!" The bigger of the two watchmen held out a hand.

"There's a girl, in an alley off Chapel Street . . ." Kerry stopped to catch her breath.

"There usually is, lass." The big watchman grinned, showing a badly chipped tooth.

"She's dead."

HUDSON'S KILL

He frowned. "Are you sure?"

"Yes, I'm sure. I watched her give her last breath. I need you to get down to the Hall and tell Marshal Flanagan."

"Oh, Marshal Flanagan is it?"

Kerry checked herself. "Yes. Tell him Kerry O'Toole told you."

The tiniest hesitation. "O'Toole?"

"Are you going to stand there and repeat everything I say, or are you going to fetch the Marshal?"

The man's face darkened. "I don't fetch. I'm not a goddamned dog."

"Right, then, leave her there," Kerry snapped. "And when some stall owner finds her tomorrow with a hole in her belly and her guts half-eaten by rats, remember that you were told she was murdered and you did nothing. I wonder what the Marshal will have to say about that, when I tell him."

She stood trembling, holding tight to Rosie.

"It's alright miss," the second watchman said. He was wiry and narrow-shouldered, with long gray hair swept back from his face. He was staring at her hands. She looked down and saw her fingers were dark with blood, which had smeared on Rosie's dress. "We'll get word to the Marshal." The man's voice was soothing. He had a faint cockney accent. "Whereabouts on Chapel Street?"

"By the Armstrong tenements. Third alley down on the left."

He nodded and smiled. He had strange eyes, with large, dark pupils and enormous irises. Like one of the husky dogs she had seen on the waterfront, years ago. She felt nervous and reassured at the same time.

"Thank you for telling us," he said. "Now are you all right to go on home with the child there? Do you need us to come with you?"

"No. I'm fine."

"Right you are, then. Good night."

The watchman with the broken tooth was staring at her, an odd look on his face.

"What?" she snapped.

"If it is a murder, like you say, the Marshal will want to talk to you."

Kerry held Rosie tight. "He knows where to find me."

TWO



Justy Flanagan knelt beside the body. “Hold the lamp higher, please, Sergeant.”

It was a trick of the light, caused by the flickering candle, but Justy could have sworn the girl gave a slight smile. It could not be, though, because she was long dead, her limbs stiffening and her skin waxy and ashen.

She lay on her right shoulder, one arm draped so that her right hand was cupped loosely over her lower belly. The wound in her torso was a long, dark slash. Her entrails were a pale tumble of old ropes.

Sergeant Vanderool leaned close. “He must have been one unsatisfied customer.” He bumped against Justy’s shoulder. He smelled of grease and damp wool and whiskey.

Justy was a tall, narrow-faced man, with high cheekbones and long fair hair that flopped over a pair of blue-gray eyes. He was one of five Mayor’s Marshals, but he wore no uniform. Instead, he was dressed casually, in a dark green coat and cream-colored whipcord breeches that were now soaked through the knees with God knew what. His boots were not doing much better. They were made of butter-soft brown leather, but they were getting old. He had taken them from the body of an English cavalry officer that he had killed in a skirmish during the Rebellion in Ireland, five years before. He had worn them almost every day since. They had been repaired over and over, but now that he could feel water seeping through the soles and stitching, he wondered if it was time for them to retire.

“That’s a lot of assumptions you’re making, Sergeant.”

“That so?” Vanderool hawked, and spat against the wall. “What other kind of woman’s going to be down this way but a *stephoer*? And only a man’s going to do damage like that.”

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Justy looked around the dank, narrow alley. It was well past dusk, and the light from the lantern cast long shadows against the mottled walls and made the churned, muddy ground into a battlefield. Vanderool had a point. "Has anyone touched her?"

"No."

"Are you sure?"

The sergeant rolled his eyes. He was a slope-shouldered, pot-bellied man of about fifty years, with thin hair and a receding chin covered in stubble. "Mister Playfair," he called out. "Anyone been down here since you found her?"

"No, Sergeant," a voice came back down the alley. "No one but you and the Marshal."

"Satisfied?" Vanderool's voice was sharp.

Justy ignored him. He touched the girl's neck. She was as cold as the water soaking his trousers. He shifted position, took a breath, and slipped his fingers into the long wound that split her torso. The skin was as stiff as salt-soaked canvas; her intestines were slick and cold against the palm of his hand. He had to swallow hard to keep down the bile that seared the back of his throat. He closed his eyes and slid his hand into the body cavity, past the knuckles. It was freezing in the alley, but he could feel a trace of warmth under his fingertips.

"What in God's name are you doing?" Vanderool was aghast.

"Something I learned in France." Justy had spent time with the Paris police as a student, and had gone back the summer before to learn about the techniques their criminal detectives were developing. He sat back on his haunches, tugged a handkerchief from his cuff and used it to wipe his hands. "See how her legs are stiffening, slightly?"

"Rigor mortis. We all know about that."

"Yes, but it hasn't set in yet. It usually takes four hours or so, depending on the cold. And the core of her body is still warm to the touch. So we know a few things."

"Such as?"

"Such as she wasn't long dead when Mister Playfair found her."

Vanderool sniffed and shuffled his feet. "Come on, then. We need to get her out of here. There's a crowd gathering. We don't want to set them off."

Justy nodded. Vanderool might be an Irish-hating, nativist bully, but he was no fool. He knew the city well, and he knew that the alley they were standing in was only a stone's throw from the Canvas Town slums. Which meant

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the crowd outside was almost certainly made up of poor black men, most of whom would resent the presence of white faces on their turf.

He stood up, wincing as a sharp pebble poked through the sole of his right boot. Another reminder to have the damn things mended.

"Very well, Sergeant," he said. "Let's get her up to the morgue."

Vanderool barked an order, and Justy walked back to the street, stepping out of the way of two lads carrying a stretcher and a blanket. Perhaps a dozen men stood a few yards away, watching. They were all a little drunk and a little curious, speculating about what was down there in the dark.

There was no tension in the air, but the two watchmen were taking no chances. They stood in the center of the street, facing the crowd of black men, their clubs on their shoulders. Playfair was the bigger of the pair, an inch over six feet, and broad as a heifer. Justy had seen him in action before, and knew he was the kind who relished a fight and never held back. Tasty, in the vernacular. He caught Justy looking at him and grinned, showing a broken tooth.

Gorton was slighter and shorter, although not by much. His eyes flicked back and forth, scanning the faces in the crowd. He looked older than Playfair, with long, steel-gray hair and a face like a hatchet. Justy didn't know him well. He was a Londoner, a former soldier who had come to New York less than a year ago. A quiet, thoughtful man.

The stretcher bearers emerged from the alleyway. The blanket bulged obscenely. The men had tucked it in under the dead girl's body, to keep her entrails from spilling out.

A growling sound came from the crowd. Justy felt his skin prickle. Suddenly, men were shouting, loud and angry.

"What have you done?"

"They've killed him!"

"Damn them!"

Playfair and Gorton swung the clubs off their shoulders and planted their feet wide. Justy motioned at the stretcher bearers to stop. He stepped forward between the watchmen. "Gentlemen, please disperse and leave us to do our work."

"Looks like you've done your work already, you cossack bastard!" The voice was heavy and slurred with drink.

Justy held up a hand. "Someone called us here. A person has been killed. We are taking the body to the morgue. Please let us pass."

"Murderers!" The man was fast. He lunged out of the crowd, straight for

HUDSON'S KILL

Justy, the dull gleam of a blade in his hand. Playfair swung hard, a killer blow, but the man slid in the mud, and the club slashed through the air above his head. The man recovered and sprang forward, his knife aimed at Justy's belly.

But Justy was no longer there. He had taken a long step forward with this right foot, so that he was side-on to the man. His left forearm kept the knife hand clear, and his right hand shoved the man in the back, driving him forward under his own momentum until he tripped over Justy's outstretched foot. He sprawled on the ground, his face in the mud.

Playfair stepped up and kicked the knife away. He raised the club.

"Let him go," Justy ordered.

Playfair lowered his weapon, a sour look on his face. The man scrambled to his feet. He went to pick up his knife, but Playfair lunged at him. "Go on, ya madge. I won't miss twice."

The man slunk away. There was a smatter of applause from the crowd. "Nice moves, Marshal," someone shouted.

"Frisk's over, gents. Time to go back to your cribs," Gorton said. He was still facing them, standing easy, his club on his shoulder as though he was out for a stroll. "Unless you want me to set the Marshal here on you, o' course."

There was a ripple of laughter. The workers began to drift away.

Justy looked for Vanderool, but the sergeant had disappeared. Scuttled back to his warm bed, no doubt, Justy thought, then chastised himself for the thought. The man had come immediately when he was called, after all.

Justy motioned to the stretcher bearers. They picked up the girl and walked slowly away from the alley. One of the men slipped on the mud, falling to one knee, and the stretcher lurched sideways, the body shifting so that the blanket slipped back, revealing the girl's face. Her eyes were still open, staring emptily up at the sky, her skin slack, her lips parted slightly.

Gorton pulled the stretcher bearer upright. He stood over the body for a moment, then smoothed his palm over the girl's face, closing her eyes. He pulled the blanket up. The stretcher bearers carried her away.

Gorton and Playfair were Watch wardens. The Watch was mostly made up of volunteers who worked during the day and stood in sentry boxes around the city during the dark hours, keeping an eye out for fires. But there were six professionals, full-time employees of Federal Hall, whose job was to patrol the city during the night. These wardens went in pairs from box to box, ensuring the volunteers were awake, and acting as runners in the event of a fire.

"Which one of you men found the body?" Justy asked them.

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"Me," Playfair answered. "We was passing this way and I thought I heard a sound. Come down to see what was what, and there she was."

"Did you touch her?"

"Just to see if she was quick or dead."

"And?"

Playfair shrugged. "She was still warm."

"And then you came straight down to the Hall?"

"Mister Gorton came down. I stayed on stag."

Justy nodded. Playfair was the senior man, in terms of time served. "Is this your usual route?"

"We vary the routes. Captain's orders." Playfair looked smug.

"I see." Justy looked him in the eye. "Why didn't you raise the alarm when you found her? She wasn't long dead, so her killer might still have been in the vicinity. If you'd blown your whistle and raised the Watch, we might have had a chance at catching him."

Playfair scowled.

"The doer was long gone, Marshal," Gorton said. His eyes were fixed on a point over Justy's left shoulder.

"How would you know that?"

"Stomach wound like that, it takes a long time to die. No major vessels cut. No damage to the heart or lungs. Just a long, slow bleed."

"You sound as though you've some experience."

"I seen a lot of men die with their guts opened up. In Guadeloupe."

Justy nodded. He remembered reading Gorton's file. The man had been a corporal of the King's Marines. He had fought in the vanguard of the British force that had taken the Caribbean island of Guadeloupe from the French in a savage, almost suicidal action. The newspapers had been full of the story at the time. The assaulting forces had run out of ammunition early, and a resupply had been intercepted. But the British had attacked regardless, and taken the outpost using nothing but raw bravery and the bayonet.

Justy suppressed a shiver. He knew what it was like to face a wall of English bayonets.

He looked around at the muddy street and the ramshackle warehouses. Several were tanneries. There was a strong smell of fermented urine. It was a bad place to die.

"I'll assign one of your watchmen to stand guard here until the morning.

HUDSON'S KILL

Instruct him that no one is to go down this alley until I return. Then go to the Almshouse. I need you there, in case anyone comes to claim the body. If they do, one of you stay with them, while the other comes to fetch me. Is that clear?"

"Aye, Marshal," they said in unison.

Justy followed the stretcher bearers along Chapel Street. The mud clung to the heels of his boots, and he could feel water sloshing around his sodden right foot. He had a sudden memory of Ireland, cool mud between his toes, and then of the ensign of cavalry who had owned the boots before him, sitting atop his horse, his pistol leveled at Justy's head. Justy had stood in the marshy water and waited, staring at the small, black hole of the pistol's muzzle. But the ensign had failed to cock his pistol properly. He had squeezed the trigger but the hammer had not snapped forward as he expected, and when he realized his mistake, his eyes had opened impossibly wide. Sky blue, the same color as the facings on his jacket. Justy had hurled himself out of the marsh, dragged the ensign off his horse, and stabbed him in the throat. The man hadn't needed his boots after that.

He heard footsteps behind him. Playfair was hurrying along the street, his feet squelching in the muck. The big watchman stopped and kept his eyes on the ground. "One thing I left out in my report, sir, before."

"Yes?"

"When I said it was me what found her, sir, well, that wasn't quite right."

"What do you mean? You didn't find her?"

"Not exactly, sir."

Justy sighed. "Be direct, Mister Playfair, please. I have an appointment."

Playfair had a sour look on his face. "Very well, sir. What I meant to say is, I did find the girl, but I was tipped off."

"By whom?"

"By a young woman, sir. She said she knows you. Asked for you by name."

"And did she give her name in return?"

"Kerry O'Toole."

Justy was glad it was dark and there were no streetlights in this quarter of the town. "Miss O'Toole found the body?"

"Yes, sir. She said she heard the girl breathe her last, and that we should fetch you."

"I see." In the dim light, far behind Playfair, the bend in Chapel Street

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PADDY HIRSCH

looked like the entrance to a dark, narrow cave. Justy wondered why Kerry had come this way. "I commend you for coming to tell me the truth, Playfair. What was it that prompted you to do so?"

The sour look returned to the watchman's face. "I couldn't rightly say, sir." Justy hid his smile. "Well, whatever it was, you would do well to cultivate it."

THREE



Justy leaned on the wall of a warehouse opposite the Owens compound and tried to ignore the stench from the Collect Pond that seeped over the Broad Way. It was a potent mixture of rotten fish, decaying meat, burned hops, and urine, made all the more pungent by a blanket of thick clouds that covered the city. He wondered how the people crammed into the new tenements on Elm Street could stand it. But stand it they did. They even used the pond as a source for drinking water.

There was a light burning in the window of Kerry's cottage. Justy knew she would be sitting in the armchair beside the window, reading by the light of a three-stick candelabra. Something by Swift or Richardson, he supposed. He felt a spark of envy. Most of the books on his night table these days related to the law.

He tugged his watch free of the fob on his waistcoat and squinted at the face. It was too dim to read, but he had heard St. Peter's bell strike nine, so he knew he was now catastrophically late for dinner.

Eliza would understand. She was twenty-two years old, a doctor's daughter with sparkling blue eyes and a mouth that rose on one side and fell on the other when she was trying not to laugh, which seemed to be all the time. They had only met twice, the first time in Philadelphia a month ago. He was giving evidence in court; she was handing out books to veterans at the City Hall. When they had met again, two weeks later, at the Governor's Ball, he was surprised to learn she lived in New York. He was even more surprised when she had taken his arm for a stroll by the Battery, and bombarded him with questions: about him, about books, and about how best to help the immigrants that were flooding the city, usually without prospects of any kind. He wasn't

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used to women talking about anything other than themselves or what they were wearing. It was a pleasant feeling.

He took a deep breath, walked across the street, and knocked. When Kerry opened the door, her face was shadowed by the candlelight behind her.

"You must be chilled to the timbers, standing out there all this time," she said.

"You saw me?"

"Like a spare peg at a wedding. I don't know how you managed to creep up on all them English during the Rebellion. They must have all been drunk or half-asleep."

He shrugged. "Most of them likely were."

She looked down her nose at him, a half smile on her face. She wore a long dress and a heavy woolen shawl. Her hair fell in a dark wave over her right shoulder. He thought about the habit she had, of curling it around her right hand, over and over, as she read. He swallowed the vague sense of panic that rose in him. "May I come in?"

She stood aside. "There's no fire."

The room was small and plain, with a table and two upright chairs at one end, and a swept fireplace flanked by two armchairs at the other. There was a door opposite that led to her bedroom. It was ajar, and as Justy walked in, he heard a sound come from it. He looked at Kerry.

She smirked. "Jealous?"

He felt the heat in his face and she laughed. "Don't worry, ye drumbelo. It's just wee Rosie Tully. She's only five, but she snores like an old man."

"Seamus and Tamsin's girl?"

"They had their hands full tonight."

They each took an armchair. Justy nodded towards the bedroom. "Was Rosie with you when you found the girl?"

Kerry's face seemed to close up. "I couldn't leave her in the street."

"Of course not."

"I told her to look away. It was dark. I don't think she saw anything."

Justy nodded. "There's nothing else you could have done."

Kerry swallowed. "It was like the girl was holding on for someone to come. So someone would be there when she died."

The words hung for a moment in the chilly air of the plain room. There was a book on the small table between the armchairs. Wax from the cande-

labra had dripped onto its cover. *The Coquette, or, The History of Eliza Wharton.*

"Is it any good?" he asked.

"I'm not sure many men would say so."

"I heard it was written by a woman."

"Too lowbrow for you, then?"

Justy drummed his fingers on the arm of his chair. "Tell me about the girl."

"She was lying on her side." Kerry's voice was tight. "She had a kind of thin robe wrapped around her. One of her shoes was off. She was crying. I tried to turn her, and then . . ."

Justy waited.

"She'd been cut open. She had her arms wrapped around her." Kerry swallowed. "But the innards were spilled out of her. She was half-frozen."

She bent her head and her hair fell across her face.

"Did she say anything?"

"No."

"Did you see anyone?"

"No."

"Did you take anything from the alley?"

She looked up. She shook her head.

"Just one more thing, then. Why were you down there in the first place?"

"What? Are you worried about me now?" Her voice was clotted.

"As a matter of fact, yes. That's a dangerous area, Kerry."

"Why? Because of all the darkies? Did you forget I'm half darky myself?"

"That has nothing to do with it. That girl you found had darker skin than you, and that didn't save her. Now why were you there? It's hardly the most direct way to here."

Kerry took a deep breath. The light caught her face for a moment, showing the strain around her eyes. "The direct way is along Elm Street."

Justy nodded. The week before he had stood in the center of a line of watchmen at the corner of Elm and Barley streets, holding back a crowd of angry black men who were intent on tearing the heads off a crew of construction workers. At first he had thought it was an ordinary labor dispute between blacks and whites, but then he saw that the builders had begun to dig up the old Negro burial ground.

The cemetery had been closed nearly a decade ago, in 1794, but the city

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appeared to have gone back on its promise to leave the ground untouched. The workers didn't know who had employed them, and there were no records at Federal Hall of anyone applying for permission to start work on the site. After Justy had stopped the dig, the workers had not returned, but the long, dark scar of open ground in the corner of the old burial ground remained. Justy was not superstitious, but even he had to ask how the spirits of the thousands of men, women, and children buried over the years might take exception to being disturbed so callously in the name of progress. And how they might react.

"You might do better to stay on the Broad Way in future." He pulled out his watch.

"Nice tatler," she said.

He nodded. It was not a particularly thin piece, and it was made of silver, not gold, but it was precious to him. Jacob Hays, the High Constable, had presented him with it on his first anniversary as Marshal, two years before.

"No dummy?" Kerry smirked. It had become the fashion for men to carry two watches on their person, one of which was a fake, a disk of cheap metal painted gold tucked into the opposite fob pocket from the real watch. The idea was to confuse thieves, who would not know which of a man's twin watch chains was attached to the genuine article. But Kerry had been one of the best pickpockets in the city, and she knew all it took was a little patient surveillance. Wait until the swell draws his thimble from its pit, and then have at it.

Twenty-five minutes past nine. He tucked the watch away. "I'll leave you be, Kerry. Thank you for telling the watchmen to send for me."

He was halfway to the door before she spoke. "How's the doctor's daughter, by the way?"

He stopped and turned slowly.

"It's a small town, Justy. You can't walk a girl along the water for more than an hour in this town without some cove noticing."

"Is that so?"

Kerry's mouth twisted. "I didn't know you liked the fair ones. Or maybe it's not her looks that draws you. Her father's a wealthy man, I'm told, for a nimgimmer. A big house here, and a spread across the river, too. She's quite the catch."

His face burned, and she laughed. "Boys a dear, you always were easy to rake." Her voice was bitter. "But don't worry. I know you're not the kind to whore yourself. Not like me."

HUDSON'S KILL

“Kerry . . .”

“I’ll see you, Justy.”

It was like having a door slammed in his face. He took one last look at her, sitting in the shadows, staring into the empty grate, then he turned and walked out into the night.

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