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## Who Is Neil Wells?

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# Who is Neil Wells?

By Colin Holmes Anderson

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the Bachelor of  
Arts in Creative Writing

Linfield University

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Approved by Joe Wilkins

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# Who is Neil Wells?

By Colin Holmes Anderson

*For my Family*

## PROLOGUE

Abigail Smith was tired. Not that she was sleepy, no, this was the sort of tiredness that made one wish for a bottle of something strong. She usually wasn't in the mood for a drink, and it certainly wasn't legal, but she longed to be with her friends in Idaho and tell them that she was okay, that she hadn't lost her love of adventure, that she had survived a strange and harrowing ordeal. Soon the train would be far from the city and she would be away from all that had taken place in those last few months. Across from her sat an old man wearing a worn uniform from the Great War. He had a short white beard, held a wooden cane, and stared at her with cool grey eyes.

"What do you want?" she finally asked. Usually, she was patient with elderly folks, but she wasn't in the mood.

"I'm sorry if I'm bothering you," the man replied in a friendly tone. "It's simply that you had a look about you that I recognize."

"A look?"

"Yes, it's the weariness in your eyes, I've seen it in the men under my command when they've returned from battle, and I suffered from it the first time I returned from the trenches." Abigail looked away quickly. She debated whether or not to move to another seat, but the old man would not be dissuaded. "I am an old soldier and I have seen much, but the stories of those with that look always worry me. I have been around a lot of young people and know when they are troubled. Will, you tell me what happened?"

Abigail considered what he said. Was there any harm in telling this old man her story? "Will you promise not to tell anyone?" To Abigail this was non-negotiable.

"I've kept many secrets from my army days," he assured her. With that promise made, Abigail Smith began her story.

## CHAPTER 1

### The Arrival and a Chance Meeting

I had been born the youngest of a family of four. Having to compete with three older brothers for our parent's attention, I was often ignored. We lived in the town of Dagwood, Idaho on a small beet and potato farm. Growing up, I was expected to help with the farm work. During the harvest, my fingernails would become so caked with dirt that no amount of scrubbing could ever get them truly clean. In my spare time, when I wasn't at school or working on the farm, my grandmother's small shelf of books became my oasis. They provided solitude, a peaceful place away from my chores, and from my brothers' bickering. I had a fondness for mystery stories, with Poe and Dickens being particular favorites of mine. The books, in my mind, would take me far away, to distant cities and countries. One day, I would be in the dark cobbled streets of Boston and the next day, I would be on the narrow-bricked alleyways of London. I imagined myself wearing a dark coat draped over my shoulders, weaving through foggy passageways, the cool orange glow of gas lamps illuminating the world around me.

By the time I was thirteen, I had become quite the sleuth. I had discovered where my mother had lost her wedding ring by examining the indentations in the baking flour, and on another occasion, I had uncovered which of Mr. Timothy's sons had vandalized our pig pen based on the blue paint under his fingernails.

Four years later, I told my mom I wanted to be a detective. It was then that I learned that most women did not become detectives. Still, my mother was supportive and suggested that I ought to become a journalist. However, this would require a degree and my father did not believe women should go to college. But with mother's persuasion, he finally, agreed. I received my degree from the University of Idaho. I sensed that my professors did not have great expectations of me, and so, I spent most of my time studying, eager to prove them wrong. Eventually, my work paid off. I proudly stood on the stage on graduation day with



my other mostly male classmates and received my diploma. From there I knew that I was going to try to leave Idaho behind for good.

I had no particular reason to choose Seattle. I could have chosen another city on the west coast, like Portland, but I heard that there were jobs and that the city was growing. I'll admit that something about the city interested me. I think it was the way that the brick buildings were built along the water front with curved archways above the windows. It reminded me of the way the streets of Boston were described in my grandmother's mystery novels.

When I arrived in Seattle on the 16th of May, I stepped down off the train on King Street Station. I was excited, who wouldn't be? Me! A girl who grew up digging up potatoes on an Idaho farm, had made it to a proper city! Look out world here comes Abigail Smith! I carried with me my favorite fountain pen and a notepad in my small leather purse, the heavy Gladstone carpet bag my father had gifted me firmly in my grip, and an optimistic smile on my face. I was shocked at how many people were in the station. The marble-floored interior bustled with activity as people hurried along, dragging over-loaded bags behind them, corralling small children, and lining up to purchase tickets. In front of me were the smattering of fellow passengers who had disembarked from my train. I saw the weary-looking mother who had sat across from me holding onto her red-faced, screeching infant and the man in a suit and tie with a fedora who had jumped on the train right before the doors had shut back in Idaho. Most of us were small-town people unused to the bustle of crowds. Trying to escape the din, I found myself swept up in a group shuffling towards the exit. Finally, I was out of the station and I felt for the first time the cool damp air. Looking back, and peering up at the station's brick building, I saw a clocktower above me. It reminded me of the photo I'd seen once of that famous tower in London. Even though this one was much smaller, it was still amazing to a girl who had never seen a building taller than the town church spire. A drizzle began to bounce off my shoulders and I pulled my cloak over my head. The streams of cold rain flowed down the streets mixing with loose mud and rocks, seeping around my shoes and into cast iron drains. This was different from the rain back home. In Idaho, we had

thunderstorms that came down hard and fast but cleared up just as quickly. The rain here was misty and smelled like the sea.

Walking up the steep hill away from the station, the buildings around me were square and set into the hillside. As I reached the top, they gradually tapered, as the city around me came into clearer view. On the sidewalk, there were some shiny glass rectangles set into the cement. Some of them were lit up from under the street. I silently wondered what secret underworld could be hidden beneath them. Unfortunately, that would have to wait until later. Right now, I had to focus on practical matters that were more important. I had arranged to rent a room in a house in the Beacon Hill neighborhood, and pulling my cracked pocket watch from my skirt, I saw that it was still an hour until the room would be ready. The long train ride and subsequent walking had made me hungry and tired. I was glad to see the large sign of a restaurant named the Merchant's Cafe on the street in front of me.

As I walked into that cafe, I saw a burly, broad-shouldered man standing behind the counter. He wore a stained white apron.

"What can I get ya?" he said in a gruff and stiffly polite tone as I sat on the leather stool in front of him. A small tattered and grease-stained menu was dropped on the counter in front of me. Looking at it, I saw the only options were steak, eggs, and toast.

"I guess I'll have the steak and eggs," I said, handing the menu back to him. He snatched it from my hands and walked through a swinging door behind him, revealing a kitchen that seemed as though it hadn't been cleaned for ages. Taking a look around the restaurant, I noted that only a few people were sitting at tables. On the seat next to me, I spotted a recently discarded *Seattle Times*, and, picking it up, began to read the headline.

## Body Found in Elliot Bay!

*Police are investigating the mysterious circumstances surrounding a body found in Elliot Bay. Early yesterday morning, local crab fisherman, Johnny Tanaka reported to authorities that he had found the body floating in the shallow waters.*

*“I had just pulled in my crab basket at exactly six o’clock like I do every morning,” he told police. “When this body floated up. I nearly fell overboard when I saw what it was.” Police were informed half an hour later. “I didn’t want to touch the thing, so I left it on my boat, and told a boy to phone the police. They soon came, looked it over, and took it away.” Police later identified the body as belonging to Adam Winchester—a local police officer who had been an experienced investigator for the Seattle Police Department. He had been shot once in the lung, and so far, no weapon has been recovered.*

*If you have any information, please contact Detective Clemens at 555-1795-403.*

I felt a tremble of excitement, terrible as that may sound, it was like something out of the detective stories on my grandma’s shelf. Back home the biggest mystery was when Joe Taylor’s favorite cow went missing. It had been a Tuesday night when Joe had forgotten to lock the cow’s pen and she had wandered across the train tracks and into the woods. There had been a search, but it was only after I had thought to look where the bush was trampled that we were able to find her.

Engrossed in the newspaper article, I didn’t hear the door open behind me, but suddenly, a tall man with a cap was sitting on the stool next to me. He was older, perhaps in his fifties or so. He wore a dirty brown coat over a police uniform. I pulled my stool over to give him some more space.

“Hello, Clemens,” the man at the counter said to the officer with a grunt, “The usual?” Clemens nodded, taking off his coat, and tossing it haphazardly over a stool.

“Hi!” I said in a friendly tone. “Are you a police officer? The only police we have back home is the sheriff. I could tell you’re a policeman because you

have the badge, all police officers have a badge, or at least that's what my books told me."

"Huh," Clemens asked. "What are you on about? Besides, I'm a detective, not just some beat cop, get it right."

"Oh, my apologies, you're the first detective I've met. Oh! I haven't even introduced myself." I held out my hand to him. "My name is Abigail O'Leary Smith."

"And I should care why?" he asked, ignoring my outstretched hand.

"Well, back home, we like to know people's names Mr. Police Officer," I said in a somewhat saucy manner. I believed that since we were sitting at the counter that he should at least introduce himself.

"Well, you're not back home now, are you?" He said with a toothy, tobacco-stained grin. He leaned back and stared up at the ceiling. "Although, I suppose one cannot blame a woman for her chattiness."

I was taken aback by this. "You are quite pretty," he continued, "why don't you let me take you around? A girl like you might get hurt by yourself."

I was just about to respond when we heard the familiar creak of the door opening. A younger man in a clean pressed police uniform and a boyish face walked in with a confident step. His whitish blond hair peeked out from his blue cap. Walking up to us, he gave me an apologetic smile which highlighted his blue eyes.

"Good afternoon miss," he said, taking off his cap and holding it to his chest. "It looks like you've already been acquainted with my partner Clemens. I hope he's been polite and friendly to you." I could hear a hint of sarcasm in his voice.

"Everything is alright," I responded, a bit flustered. "My name's Abigail."

"I wasn't doing nothing. I was only telling her that she shouldn't be walking around by herself." Clemens replied sullenly.

"Well, we all know how welcoming you are Clemens" the younger man replied as he leaned forward and stuck out a gloved hand, "I'm Neil, by the way, Detective Neil Wells."

“You’re a detective?” I asked, “But you look so young!”

“They still haven’t given him the new badge either,” Clemens interjected. I looked back with annoyance at the tobacco-scented man, but to my surprise, Neil gave a hearty laugh.

“It’s true,” he admitted, “I was only promoted about a month ago.” His eyes glanced down at the newspaper article in front of me. “Grisly, isn’t it?” he remarked. I sensed a professional detachment from his manner, but I thought he might know something about it.

“So, what happened?” I asked innocently.

“Well, I can’t really say...” he admitted.

“I think I might go down there,” I said. “You know, to take a look around. I’m new in town, and I’ve never seen Puget Sound. I wanted to be a detective as well, but ended up becoming a reporter. I came here looking for a journalism job.”

“Just be careful,” he told me. “The area around Elliot Bay can be a bit rough.”

Considering his advice, I placed the money for my meal and the tip on the counter, and grabbed my purse and the Gladstone bag. To my shock, as I stepped out onto the street, a scraggly-looking man ran out in front of me. His shoulder rammed into mine and my bag fell to the ground as I landed heavily on my rear. Quickly standing up, I saw my attacker snatch my purse off the ground. Before I could scream, the door opened again and Neil stepped out, firmly grabbing the man’s arm with my purse in it.

“Getting into trouble again Eric?” Neil asked, staring sternly at the man.

“What’s it to you?”

“Sorry, can’t have you robbing the city’s guests.”

Neil reached down and unhooked the man’s grasp on my bag. Lifting it up he handed it back to me. The man gave me and Neil a dirty look before scampering off.

“Sorry about that,” Neil said, helping me up. “This area can be a mess.”

Rearranging my cloak, I put my purse strap over my shoulder. My heart pounded, but I was determined not to show my fear. Finally, having recomposed myself, I turned to Neil and asked, “shouldn’t you arrest that guy?”

“No point, even if I did, he’d be out on the street in a day. Well, I have to get going, they’re going to need me back at the station. Hey, are you going to be, okay?”

At that moment I wanted to say no, but I found I couldn’t. If I said no here, I would never be able to survive this city on my own. I would have to travel back to Idaho and live on my parent’s farm for the rest of my life. So, instead, I said, “Oh yes, yes, yes, I’ll be quite alright, you know where I come from, we have to be made of strong stuff!”

“I don’t doubt that,” Neil replied, and with a friendly smile, he tipped his cap and began walking down the street.

I watched as he turned the corner and disappeared from view before setting off on my way. It was only a short walk to the Sound. The rain had still not let up, but the sun was starting to peek out of the clouds when I arrived at the seawall that ran along the waterfront. I could see that it was low tide. Barnacles and starfish had adhered themselves to the concrete berm. Walking down the road I followed the coastline for a while. Eventually, I came across a short dock that jutted out from the seawall, it looked as though it was ready to collapse. Looking closer I saw what looked like footprints, dark gray ones, on the wooden planks. I did not find the prints’ existence to be particularly odd, but thought it strange that they appeared to be turned backwards and seemed to drop directly into the water.

After a while, I pulled out my pocket watch and flipped it open to find that it was only a short time before my room would be ready. I had chosen a small boarding house that had a good reputation and only rented to women. My father would never agree to me living in a house with men. Before I left Idaho, my parents had fretted about me going into the city.

“Don’t go into speak-easies, don’t talk to bums,” they’d say. They also warned me not to get too close to anyone and not to look a stranger right in the

eye. I flipped my watch shut, picked up my bag and began to make my way towards Beacon Hill.

When I finally arrived at the white boarding house, a large man with a thick black beard and a bowler hat was standing by the door, smoking a cigar. Noticing me, he took it out of his mouth and tapped it against the white railing.

“If you’re here for the room, you’re late,” he stated, clearly annoyed. I stood panting, bent over with my hands on my thighs and rain dripping from my cloak.

“Sorry. I got caught up!” I apologized. “You see I just met some nice police officers and we got started chatting about that murder in the Sound...” I stopped when I saw he wasn’t listening. I reached out to shake his hand and grasping mine firmly, he pulled me towards him, his sunken eyes peering closely at my face as if deeply examining it. I wriggled my hand free and stepped backward, his breath was rancid with smoke.

“I’m Abigail,” I said, coughing.

“I know who you are, I read the letter you sent to my wife.”

“Yes, of course, Is Mrs. Hancock here?”

“She’s out, but I’ll show you to your room.”

“Well, I guess so.” I could feel a growing sense of embarrassment as I followed him into the building.

“Here’s your room.” Mr. Hancock stopped at a wooden door with the number 103 painted on it in red. With a grunt, he tossed me a small black key. I stumbled, trying to catch it, and watched as it dropped to the floor. Picking it up, I saw that it had the room’s number engraved onto it.

“Good catch,” he remarked with sarcasm after I had picked the key up. Taking a puff from his cigar. “You’ll be charged if you lose the key, so be careful.”

The door hinges screeched as I opened the door and stepped in. It was pitch dark and I felt around for a light switch, finally coming across the round metal button. The room filled with an orange glow from a fixture that dangled precariously from a chain attached to the ceiling. The walls were covered in a

floral print wallpaper. A twin-sized bed was pushed to one side and a small dresser was against the other wall. A pitcher and basin sat on top of the dresser. It had been difficult finding someone who would rent to me, since I was from out of town and couldn't afford much. It was a wonder that I was lucky enough to hear about this place from a friend back home.

I dropped my bag by the bed and looked around the room, staring up at the glowing fixture swinging above me. Sure, the place was cheap, and the wallpaper was peeling off in places to reveal nailed boards, but it was my place. In time, I could fix it up and make it more presentable. Then I remembered the murder, and I pulled the newspaper from my bag along with a pair of scissors. As I sat on the bed, I cut along the edge of the article. I would paste it into one of my notebooks later. Tomorrow, I was going to get up and find myself a journalism job.



## CHAPTER 2

### The New Job

The next day, my job search began in earnest. I traveled up to the *Seattle Times* building by trolley car and stood in the foyer area filling out a lengthy job application. I had never been on a trolley before, and the ride had unnerved me. When I was finally able to speak with the hiring manager, he looked over my job experience and said, "Sorry, we only hire experienced writers." In all honesty, I didn't expect to get a job at the *Seattle Times* right away. I thought another smaller paper would accept me, and, in time, I could move on to bigger newspapers. But I found that even the neighborhood newspapers wouldn't hire me.

"We're looking for someone with more experience." Their editors told me. Those papers were even more difficult for me to travel to and I was exhausted from trying to understand the trolley routes. Eventually, I started looking for a job at periodicals, all of which rejected me. As enthusiastic as I was, after many rejections, I began to feel discouraged.

Later on, I was sitting at the counter of the Merchant's Cafe going over wanted ads when the owner, whose name I had learned was Louis, leaned over the counter. "Having trouble?" He asked, refilling my drink.

"I'm used to trouble," I stated.

"You know, I could spice up that ginger ale of yours, on the house."

"Unless you mean lemon juice, I'm not interested."

"Eh, suit yourself." He shrugged turning away. "Hey," he said after a moment. "If you need a job, I've heard some rich woman on Capitol Hill is looking for a new house cleaner. I know it's not quite what you're looking for, but, hey, it will pay the bills. They've had trouble keeping their housekeepers, and they need someone quickly."

A few days earlier I would have been insulted at the idea of being a housecleaner, but looking at my financial situation, I realized that I needed a job and I wasn't going to be picky. Louis handed me a card with a name and address on it.

The next morning, I found myself standing in front of a large white Victorian-style house with a round turret built into the roof. My hands shook as I went to ring the bell and I heard a loud "DONG" resound inside the house. It felt like an eternity before the door opened and revealed a tall, lean man with short black hair wearing a butler's jacket.

"Good morning, who may I say is calling?" He spoke with a formal accent that seemed as though he was trying to hide a southern drawl.

"I'm here to ask about the housekeeping job?"

"And what may I call you?" he repeated.

"Oh, I'm Abigail, Abigail O'Leary Smith."

The tall man nodded and motioned for me to enter. As I stepped in, he said, "wait here."

After a few minutes, he returned and motioned for me to follow him into a drawing room with tastefully arranged burgundy furniture. I was told to sit on a tapestry-covered sofa and wait for the "mistress" to arrive. As I waited, I noticed how expensive the sofa appeared.

I felt tense and tried to stretch my legs out in front of me. There was a grandfather clock on the wall that went tick-tock, tick-tock as the seconds passed by. Eventually, the door opened again, and I turned my head to see a tall woman in a dropped waist dress and short blonde hair walk in, the butler trailing shortly behind her.

"Hello," I said in the friendliest tone I could muster. "I'm here for the new housekeeping position."

"Yes," she replied. She dutifully shook my hand and said, "My name is Elizabeth Wells." Turning to the butler, she said, "you may be dismissed Adwell." He nodded before quietly slipping out of the room.

As he left, Elizabeth sat on a chair across from me. She carefully surveyed my appearance, and I self-consciously smoothed the wrinkles in my skirt.

“Stand up.” She demanded. I quickly obeyed and stood erect. Getting up, she walked around me, before returning to the sofa. I wasn’t sure if I could sit down so I remained standing.

“You say you want to work for me?” She asked with an icy tone.

“Yes,” I replied. “I heard you need a new...”

“I know what you said before.” She replied curtly. “You may sit down.” I did.

“So,” she looked at me with a doubtful expression, “why should I hire you?”

I sat there for a moment. I didn’t know how to answer that question. Swallowing, I replied, “I have some skills in cleaning.”

“From where? You don’t look like you’d have a ton of experience.”

“I helped my parents around our house and worked on the family farm.”

“Lots of young women do, I don’t think that makes you unique.”

“I don’t think that,” I replied.

“What other skills do you have that would be good for this position, Miss Smith?” Elizabeth continued.

“I can garden...I’m an expert at growing vegetables.” I felt that it was okay to stretch the definition of gardening to include farming since they were pretty much the same thing in Idaho.

She looked at me skeptically, “I already have a gardener.”

“I can cook” I offered.

“Quinten is an excellent chef.” At this point, I was running out of jobs I had experience with. Eventually, I decided I would have to move beyond the more feminine pursuits.

“I’m pretty good at building stuff,” I said proudly. “I had to help build chicken coops and raise the odd barn back home.”

“I would have never guessed, either way, I already have someone for that. Now, why should I hire you?” I felt a little defeated, and she looked at me like she had won.

I sat for a moment, there was nothing left. Finally, I thought back to my first job interview at the town grocer. “But I can do all of those things, and I’m probably the friendliest person you’ll meet in the next month,” I smiled broadly.

For the first time, Elizabeth laughed. It was a cackle, but at least she was laughing. I sat back down on the couch feeling a bit more in control.

She quickly recomposed herself and replied, “You’re entertaining Abigail, okay, fine, I’ll hire you.”

“Thank you!” I exclaimed. After this the tone shifted to something more relaxed as we began to discuss things outside of my qualifications.

“So, why did you come to the city?” Elizabeth asked me.

“I came looking a journalism job,” I told her proudly.

“Really, most girls come searching for boys,” she said coyly.

I had to laugh at this. “Well, I suppose I’m unconventional. Speaking of which, do you live with just the servants? I imagine it would be lonely living in this big place with no close other family, but I know you aren’t married.”

“And how do you know that?” Elizabeth inquired, with interest.

“Well, first of all, if you were, I imagine your husband would be in charge of hiring servants. Also, you don’t have a ring.”

“You are a sharp one and you’re right. Truthfully, I’ve never held much interest in men, I feel they take away a young lady’s independence.”

“And what gives a young lady independence?” I asked.

“Cigarettes and cocktails,” she responded with a laugh.

We spent the next hour chatting before I left to get ready to start the following day.

I arrived back at the mansion per Elizabeth’s instructions at eight a.m. sharp. Adwell opened the door and informed me that from this point on I was to leave and enter the house through the side door. He remained stoic as he shut the

door behind us. “Now then, if you are to work for the mistress then you must be properly trained. If you cannot perform all of your duties efficiently, you cannot work.” I nodded in agreement. “Now remember, the mistress tends to hire people on a whim, as such I have full control over whether to fire you if I find your skills to be unsatisfactory. This next week, I will be teaching you how to perform your expected tasks and judging you accordingly.” I gulped. The butler nodded like he had dealt with inexperienced maids many times before. I have to admit, I found the work to be degrading, how could someone with a college degree end up working as a housecleaner? My lack of experience only caused further problems. The level of cleanliness required of me was exhausting. I was constantly getting tools mixed up and I almost used the wrong cleaner on the good hardwood floor before Adwell swooped in to stop me. It also took me a while to learn how to properly fold a fitted sheet, though the consequences of that were far less disastrous.

“The Mistress can never do them properly either,” Adwell admitted in confidence as he redid my shoddy work. He had warmed up to me at some point and decided I was harmless if not somewhat amusing. “If we can’t get to folding the sheets fast enough, she’ll try and do it herself, and just end up wadding them up and shoving them into the drawer.” He then ordered me not to laugh.

Eventually, he judged my training to be complete, stopped hovering over me, and let me do my work on my own. For a few weeks nothing much happened. It was a live-in position so I moved my meager belongings to a small room in the back of the house. I was relieved to be away from the boarding house and the manger’s husband who hadn’t gotten any friendlier after our first meeting.

My daily schedule went something like this. I was to get up by seven a.m. and be ready to work by eight. My first job was to serve Elizabeth’s breakfast in the dining room. Typically, it would be black coffee and eggs. While she was eating, I would wash the pots and pans and put away yesterday’s laundry. Eventually, I would hear the little bell that told me she was finished eating, and would come to take her plate and cup, this I would wash as well.

It would be around nine a.m. by this point. I'd spend the next hour doing the rest of the laundry and hanging it to dry. When ten came around, I'd do the dusting, and wash the windows. A long pole with a rag attached to it was necessary for reaching the higher windows and dusting the ceiling corners. At 11:30 a.m. I would take my lunch break. At twelve, I would serve Elizabeth her lunch. Breakfast and lunch were fairly similar processes, with the exception that lunch required many more dishes to wash.

At one p.m. we cleaned the bathrooms. Elizabeth's large stone bath in particular took a while to scrub. I also set out fresh towels. The next couple hours would often involve odd jobs that needed to be done, things like polishing the silverware or sharpening the knives. When five o'clock hit I helped prepare and serve Elizabeth's dinner before washing those dishes, and finally being dismissed. I would collapse into bed exhausted at the end of the day.

One day, I was making Elizabeth's bed when a small square of paper fell out and drifted to the floor. Bending down I could see that it was a tintype photo, a rather old one it seemed, with watermarks across the tops as if it had been kept in a damp room. Looking closer, I saw that the picture was of a child, a young blond boy of about six years of age. He was holding a uniformed man's hand. The man's face was obscured by the aging of the picture. Looking at the picture's back I read the name "Samuel" and the date January 7, 1906. Not knowing what else to do with it, I placed it carefully in the nightstand drawer and quietly went back to my duties.

That night I found Elizabeth distractedly looking through her room.

"Can I help you find something?" I asked. She looked at me skeptically, "I'm not sure if you can help me. You haven't seen an old photo around, have you?"

I explained that I had left it in her nightstand to which she sighed in deep relief.

“It’s a nice picture, are they family members?” I inquired. She hesitated as she opened the nightstand drawer.

“Oh, no one of importance,” she replied before suggesting I help Quinten in the kitchen.

The next day, I was polishing the silverware when I heard the ring of the doorbell. I wasn’t used to hearing a doorbell and it took me a moment to register. By the time I reached the foyer, the butler had already let the caller in.

With his white button-up shirt and smartly arranged fedora, I almost didn’t recognize him.

## CHAPTER 3

### Neil Makes a Visit

“Neil?” I asked with interest, running to the door, momentarily forgetting my duties.

“Abigail?” He said, with a note of confusion. “I didn’t expect you to be here.”

At this point in her story, Abigail was interrupted by the roar of the train as it entered a tunnel. The veteran cleared his throat and replied, “It sounds like you were excited to see him.”

“I thought I was,” Abigail replied. “Honestly, I was just lonely, Neil felt like the only person in the city whom I could call a friend.” Abigail leaned back in her seat and took a deep breath before continuing. “From the outset the city seems like one giant emerald monolith, but when you enter it, every little detail becomes obvious. Back home, I might see three or four people on any given day, outside of my family, and without fail, those people would stop and talk with me, no matter how busy they were. But, while walking around Seattle, I saw too many to count. Hundreds upon hundreds of people, everyone with their own lives, and with their own friends. I tried to talk with people on my first few days, but each attempt was met with blank stares and looks of impatience.”

“So, you were relieved to see a familiar face?” the veteran responded.

“Neil already knew a lot of people in the city, and I felt that through him I could meet some new friends.”

As she spoke, sunlight flooded the train again and Abigail continued her story.



I looked at Neil with some embarrassment. “I just started here. I’ll admit, it’s not the job in journalism that I had hoped for, but it’s still a steady living.” I kept staring at his clothes, he looked so different out of uniform.

“Yes, of course,” Neil replied.

“I see you two are already acquainted” Elizabeth quietly came up behind us.

“Ah, yes,” Neil said apologetically while scratching the back of his head. “We met a few weeks ago.”

“But how do you two know each other?” I inquired, looking confused.

“Well, he’s my brother,” Elizabeth said with a smile. She wrapped her arm around him and pulled him closer to herself, as if showing him off like a new car.

“You’re siblings?” I asked, surprised.

“Well of course we are.” Elizabeth told me. Neil nodded in agreement, and, awkwardly placed his hand on her shoulder as well.

I thought to myself that they got along much better than I did with my brothers, perhaps this was the difference between my simple family and the upper classes.

As I pondered the coincidence of the relationship, the two of them walked away and Elizabeth asked for tea to be brought to the drawing room. When I walked in, carrying the tea tray, they were sitting on the couch whispering to each other. Their conversation abruptly stopped, as I walked across and laid down the tray. I wondered what they were so worried about me overhearing.

“How has work been?” Elizabeth asked after a moment.

“Oh, same old” Neil replied.

“Any interesting cases?”

“Not really.”

“What about the body that got pulled out of the Sound?” I interjected. Neil and Elizabeth looked at each other quickly.

“Well, that’s not really my case.” Neil said, turning to me.

While I passed some sugar to the pair, I noticed that they were looking at one another with sideways glances, before they both took a sip of tea.

“It’s quite the coincidence,” I remarked, hoping to cut some of the tension. “My working here and having met Neil on my first day in the city.” Neil nodded quietly.

Elizabeth glanced at him. “My brother was supposed to take over the family business, but he decided being a public servant would be better. Honestly, I can’t say I don’t mind him letting me takeover. We’d probably be arguing all the time over it anyway.”

“You were always more suited for that sort of thing than me.” Neil laughed.

“Abigail,” Elizabeth turned to me. “Can you be a dear and get us the shortbreads, oh, and close the door on the way out.” Nodding dutifully, I bowed out of the room. I was glad for the excuse to leave, as I felt I had gotten myself into a situation where I didn’t belong.

Quinten was in the kitchen. He was an older man with wispy white hair that hung out over his collar.

“Need something?” he asked as I walked in.

“Shortbreads.” I told him.

“Ah, Neil must be home.”

“How did you know?”

“Lizzy always makes me get out the shortbreads when he visits.”

“He likes shortbreads?”

“Ever since I’ve known him.” Quinten said.

“Quinten, I was wondering if you knew the name, Samuel? Did Elizabeth or Neil have a friend named that?”

“Not that I can remember,” Quinten responded quickly. I found it odd how little time he took to answer me.

When he handed me the shortbreads, I noted that they didn’t appear particularly special, just plain cookies. They were set on a plate with a glass bowl above them. Carefully taking them from Quinten’s hands, I pushed the door open

with my foot making sure to hold the treats securely. I was still mastering the art of carrying trays properly.

“Miss, are you ready?” I called out before opening the drawing room door.

“Yes, you may enter.” She replied. As I walked in, I found her sitting alone.

“Where’s Neil?” I asked confused.

“Ah, something came up, he had to leave. My brother’s job means that he doesn’t have a lot of time for chit-chat.”

“I see,” I responded, I went to set the tray down, before leaving the room, I noticed that Elizabeth was staring quietly out the window.

As the days passed the strange relationship between Elizabeth and Neil deepened in my mind. When they sat together, they certainly didn’t act as I did with my brothers. It felt as if their relationship lacked the normal friendly banter that siblings usually engaged in. However, I couldn’t get the photo out of my head, nor could I figure out why it was so important to Elizabeth.

That night, I laid awake looking up at where the light from the moon cut through a shadow on the ceiling. I kept thinking in my head about the boy and uniformed man in the photo.

Abigail worried that her story was beginning to bore the old man and glanced up to see if he was still listening.

“It must have made quite the impression on you,” the veteran remarked as if responding to her look.

“I’ve always been curious; it wasn’t really the photo that interested me but the fact that Elizabeth wouldn’t tell me about it. Truthfully, she could have given me any explanation and I would have accepted it.”

The veteran nodded. “Well, please continue.” Abigail began her story again.

A few days later, I decided to return to town and see if I could meet with Neil. So, I asked Elizabeth if I could take Sunday morning off.

“I suppose I cannot keep you on the Lord’s day,” Elizabeth remarked. I had learned from my time working for her that she wasn’t the church-going type.

The first stop I made was at the police station. I didn’t want to ask Elizabeth where Neil lived but I was determined that I could get the information from his work. I stepped in carefully, unsure if this was considered proper. Back home the station was made up of a single desk and a single cell designed to temporarily hold the occasional drunk. We didn’t really have any crime and most things that happened were done by the same people. This station, on the other hand, was a bustle of activity. People walked around hurriedly with papers and did not seem as if they even noticed me.

“Hi!” I said walking up to the front desk. A middle-aged man sat behind it, with a hooked nose and square glasses.

“Yes?” He stated, looking at me like he thought I was going to be a problem.

I put on my most innocent smile and clasped my hands together tightly.

“I was wondering if, you could maybe tell me where a certain person lives?”

“And who would this person be?” he asked, leaning forward.

“An officer named Neil Wells.”

“And what relation do you have with him?”

Suddenly, an idea struck me.

“I’m his cousin.” I stated in the nicest voice I could conjure.

The man looked at me and scoffed.

“Nice try missy” he stated. “But Neil doesn’t have any cousin that I’ve ever heard of.”

“Um, he never told you about me? I’m from out of town, just visiting. This is my first time in Seattle, so I’m very lost.”

“Sorry, it’s against policy to give out addresses. You can probably imagine why.”

“Hey, you’re the girl from the cafe!” I heard behind me. Looking back, I saw Clemens walking up.

“Do you know this young lady?” The man behind the counter asked.

“We met a few days ago,” Clemens told him. Grabbing my wrist, he turned to me and said “let’s go talk outside.”

When we got out the doors. Clemens asked “What are you here for?”

“I need to talk to Neil, I said.

“What for.”

I quickly devised a lie.

“You know that big house that his sister lives in?” I asked.

“I’ve seen it, never been in there though.”

“I’ve just started working there as a housecleaner, and the mistress sent me out to deliver a message. When I got down here, I realized that I have no idea where he lives.”

Clemens laughed at this.

“Well, I did hear from Neil that his sister had just hired the girl that we had met at the cafe to be her new housecleaner.” He took a pen and a notepad from his jacket. “Here,” he said, scrawling something down. He ripped off a sheet and handed it to me. “He lives there.”

I thanked him profusely. “Don’t tell anyone I gave you this.” He warned me. I nodded before heading off again.

I was surprised to find that Neil did not live far from my old boarding house. Though his place appeared much nicer from the outset. The building was made of brick and the door was beyond a large garden guarded behind a tall wrought iron fence. A man sat outside in a covered station. The word GUARD was painted in black on the small building.

“Hi” I said in a friendly tone when the guard stuck his head out. “I was wondering if a Neil Wells lived here?”

“I can check,” he said. “It will be a minute though.” I nodded in acceptance as the man stepped out of his covered office and unlocked the iron gate. Telling me to wait here for him to return.

As I sat and waited, I pondered at how it was that Neil, a simple police officer could afford such a nice apartment. It occurred to me that he was likely receiving money from his family’s estate, and when you are wealthy you can get a job doing anything you like. I wondered then why he had chosen to be a police officer. After about twenty minutes, the guard returned with Neil in tow. He had an annoyed look about him as though he was being taken away from something of particular importance. For a second when he spotted me, it seemed like he almost looked scared, but that quickly gave way to a friendly smile.

“Oh, it’s you Abigail.” He took my hand and politely shook it. “How did you find this place?” He asked in a tone that seemed to mix wariness with confusion. I told him of how Clemens had given me his address after learning I worked for his sister.

“Well, now that you are here, we may as well chat. The sunlight on the garden is excellent.” He led me into the garden’s center, and into a white marble pagoda. In the very middle was a circular pond with some strange fish swimming in it. They almost resembled large goldfish but were striped colors of red and white. I sat on one of the white marble benches that flanked the pond.

“So, what are those fish?” I asked Neil. They were swimming playfully around each other.

“Ah those are koi,” Neil responded half-heartedly.

“Koy?” I said, pronouncing the word as best I could.

“Koi. K. O. I. they’re Japanese.”

“They’re beautiful.” I remarked.

“Innocent things often are,” Neil replied, staring at the pond. “It’s the fish that live in the dark parts of the sea that become ugly.”

“What do you mean?” I asked, confused.

“These fish were born here, guarded from predators they swim happily along, unaware of the world outside their little pond. They never worry about where their food will come from or whether they’ll become a shark’s next meal.” He said this with a distinct bitterness.

“You almost sound like you’re jealous of them”, I said teasingly.

“Perhaps I’m being unfair,” he remarked. “But enough about the fish. Abigail, why are you here?”

I brushed my hair from my eyes. I figured that now was the best time to ask my questions, but how ask them without appearing too nosy? I decided to just go for it.

“I wanted to ask you about something.”

“Go ahead,” Neil said after a moment in a friendly tone.

“I was just wondering if you heard of someone named Samuel?”

Neil appeared to be searching for how to respond.

“Samuel...” he mused. Turning to me, he asked, “have you ever lost anyone, Abigail?”

“Lost anyone?”

Neil reached into his coat pocket and pulled out a box of cigarettes and a lighter. Popping one into his mouth, he lit it and took a long drag, blowing up smoke while staring at the sky.

“Want one?” he asked, holding out his packet of Chesterfield Cigarettes.

“No thanks,” I responded. “I’ve never been much of a smoker.” Nodding politely, he placed the packet back in his jacket pocket and began.

## CHAPTER 4

### Neil Tells his Story

“We first met Samuel when we were children. It was a hot summer day and our father had decided to take us to the city. At some point, Elizabeth and I became separated from him, and quickly became lost. It was only a short time before it began to rain. My sister, quite worried about her new dress panicked and ran off, leaving me to chase after her. It wasn’t long when I heard the familiar sound of her sobbing. Rounding a corner, I found her. She was sitting in a muddy puddle, crying. I reached down to lift her up, and tried to stop her tears. It was then that I heard a voice behind us.

A boy was standing there, wearing a dark blue jacket, with a ratty old hat. Looking at his jacket I could see stitching running up and down it as if it had been torn and restitched a thousand times. I stared at this boy, with blond hair who appeared to be about my age and asked who he was.

‘Why do you want to know?’ he responded in a rude tone. By this time my Elizabeth’s tears had dried somewhat and I was able to raise her to her feet.

‘Oh, hello,’ she said, staring with interest at the boy. My sister was the polite and formal type when she was little, even to those she didn’t know. ‘You two ain’t from around here.’ He spat at us. I’ll be honest, we were scared of this street rat in front of us, especially Elizabeth, whose little hand clung to me like a vice. He had a shifty look in his eyes like he was five seconds away from deciding to make off with your wallet.

‘What’s the matter?’ he asked us ‘lost your nanny?’

‘Why don’t you shut up?’ I told him, placing my arm to shield my sister from him.

‘Oh, the rich boy is getting angry.’ He remarked. I was always told that fighting was to be avoided as much as possible, but I felt that I had something to prove. I took the first swing, or at least I tried. It went wide, the force of the punch throwing me off balance. Before I could recover a sharp pain struck my jaw



sending me reeling to the ground. My ears were ringing and I could hear Elizabeth shouting my name. I struggled to my feet, my vision blurred, the ground felt like it would slip out from under me. Still. I ran forward again, my fist clenched tightly. But just as I was to swing at him, the boy grabbed my shoulder and with his knee struck me in the stomach. I reeled again, but before I could fall, I managed to grab his shoulders. With all my might I slammed my forehead into his with a crack. I'll admit, it hurt, and it was an act of desperation, but it sent him collapsing to the ground in a heap. I followed soon after. The two of us lay there as the rain splashed off our faces. It was only a few seconds before I could hear the boy start to laugh. He rose to his feet before I could and I got the sense that he wasn't really all that hurt.

'Hey,' he said, leaning over me, 'I'm Sam, Samuel Hale.' I took his hand and allowed him to drag me up. I felt that I had passed some unspoken test of his. We spent a good while talking that day. We learned that Samuel's father was a policeman who left his son alone most days and didn't bother checking if he was going to school. So, Sam simply spent his time wandering the city streets and bumming cigarettes off people. Elizabeth wanted to know why he felt the need to make fun of us when he first met.

'I've always hated you rich folk' he explained, 'standing above the rest of us, what right do you have to come down here?' Looking over I could see my sister staring down at her feet and could see by the welling of her eyes that she was going to cry again.

'I'm sorry,' she sobbed. He stared over at her, and his expression softened.

'I suppose I can't be too harsh on you.' He stated, laying his hand gently on my sister's head. 'It's not really you, I'm mad at.'

'Really?' my sister asked.

'Yeah,' Sam told her. I wondered how he felt about me. We talked for a while more before our father finally found us and dragged us away from what he viewed was a random vagrant. He was shocked when my sister reached up and Sam's his cheek as he pulled her away. Still, I managed to get his address, and on days when we could get away, we would steal some money to call a taxi and

travel into the city to see our new friend. Sam gave Elizabeth the tintype photo as a gift, he said his father had it taken when he was six.

I listened as Neil told his story. “So, what happened?” I asked.

“I’m getting to that. One day, me and Lizzy arrived at Sam’s house. We found it open and empty. My sister saw the landlord walking by and asked if Sam was around.

‘Haven’t you heard?’ the man said, ‘both of the people living here were pulled out of a ditch stone dead a few days ago.’ You can imagine the shock that brought us. My sister still doesn’t like talking about it.”

“I’m sorry,” I responded. How else could I respond to something like that? I was sad for Neil, and I felt that my suspicions about the photo had only brought up bad memories.

“So, you, who have never seen the world outside your little town, how could you understand my grief?”

“I think you’re wrong,” I responded.

“What?”

“My uncle died in the war when I was eleven. I first heard about it when a man in a military uniform came to give my mother the news. I couldn’t talk to anyone afterward. I couldn’t believe it when the war ended a month later and everyone else got to come home.” I reached into my dress pocket and pulled out a photo I always kept of my uncle. “Look, he sent this to me only a week before he was killed.” The picture showed my uncle with his buddies sitting in a group. “That’s my Uncle Henry in front,” I told Neil, pointing at the photo.

Neil took the photo from me and stared at it a moment before handing it back.

“I suppose I must apologize,” he said. “It seems you’ve had some hard knocks in your life.”

It felt to me like Neil was being rather dismissive, but I decided not to say anything, figuring he was simply upset about the story he had told me.

He stabbed the cigarette against the bench, leaving an ashen mark on the marble.

As Neil walked me to the gate, I remembered something I had to tell him. “Hey, I went down to Elliot Bay and I noticed the oddest thing. There appeared to be footprints on a dock, but they were walking backwards, right into the bay, strange huh?”

Neil paused for a moment and avoided my eyes. “That is strange,” he finally said. “But I wouldn’t worry too much about it.”

As I was walking back from Neil’s place, I pulled out my pocket watch and found that it was only around ten. Neil’s answer was objectively satisfactory, but something still bothered me. Why was the cook so evasive? Why not just tell me who the people in the photo were? No, something was still off, and I decided that I would not be satisfied until I discovered what they were hiding from me.

Still, where was I to go from here? I needed someone else, someone who might know something but wouldn’t have a reason to hide anything. Walking down the street I scanned my memory and realized that there might be someone who knew something.

## CHAPTER 5

### Abigail Meets Gladys

While working at the mansion, I would frequently hear Adwell and Quinten mention someone named Gladys. Asking Elizabeth, I learned this was the old housekeeper, who had been loyal to Mr. Wells, but had left after he had passed away.

“I think I’d like to meet her,” I told Elizabeth one day.

“Are you certain, I’m not sure she can remember anything.”

“Well, my grandma was a bit hazy, and I was able to have nice chats with her.”

After some consideration, Elizabeth got up from her chair, told me to wait, and walked up the marbled stairs, returning a few minutes later with an address written neatly on a card.

“Here’s Gladys’ address,” she said, handing it to me.

“Thanks” I replied, taking the card from her. For a second it felt as if she didn’t want to let it go, but her resistance disappeared so quickly I felt as though it must have been my imagination.

Gladys lived somewhat outside the city limits and I was grateful that Elizabeth decided to lend me her father’s old car, knowing that I couldn’t afford to pay a taxi fee the whole way.

“Just be careful of the gearshift, it tends to stick going uphill,” she said as she handed me the keys. It was a 1903 Ford, black, and worn out and muddy, with scratches where the paint had worn off, but it started and I had to trust that it would take me there and back again.

As I drove up north, and made my way out of Seattle, I saw how the brick and concrete buildings of the city made way for the familiar pastures and farmhouses of the countryside. It was comforting, like how it feels to return to one’s own bed after a long trip. Finally, I turned up the gravel path to a white, neatly kept cottage.

I stepped up onto a white-washed porch and hesitantly knocked on the door.

“Coming!” I heard a somewhat surprised voice respond. Behind the blue door, I could hear the sounds of shuffling and snuffles. Eventually, the door swung open to reveal a thin, but strong looking elderly woman with her grey hair done up in a bun and wearing a pink apron.

“Eh?” she said, as she looked at me over her square rimmed glasses. “Who are you?”

“Hello!” I said, in a friendly tone. “My name is Abigail Smith, I wanted to know if you used to work for someone named Elizabeth Wells.”

“Yes, I was her maid. Why do you want to know?”

I knew there was no guarantee that this would lead to anything, but this woman was my best shot at figuring out what was going on.

“I’m working for her as the new maid.” I continued. “and I wanted to know if I could ask you about something.”

“What did you say?” Gladys asked. “My hearing isn’t so great anymore.” She tugged at the lobe of her left ear.

“I said, can I ask you some questions?” I repeated louder.

“Why don’t we talk inside?” Gladys suggested. Without waiting for an answer, she turned on her heels and marched back through the door. “Well come on.” She ordered, turning back to me.

Gladys stared seriously at me as we sat across from one another. She grabbed a packet of cigarettes off the table between us. Her hands shook as she lit one with a lighter from her apron pocket.

“So, you’re the new maid?” she said after taking a long drag.

“Yes,” my hands were folded over my purse. “I started working there a few weeks ago.”

“So, what brings you here? It’s been a long time since I worked for the Wells family.”

I swallowed hard, unsure of how to approach the topic.

“It’s just, I think people are keeping something from me and I was wondering if...”

“Normally people have a reason for their secrets.” Gladys looked out through the window, avoiding my gaze. She probably thought I was being a busy-body.

“I understand that,” I replied.

“So, why have you come all this way to ask me about something that does not concern you?”

“Well, I was talking to Elizabeth’s brother and he told me a story about when they were children.”

Looking up I saw that Gladys was staring off into the distance with a glassy look in her eyes.

“Are you alright?” I asked concerned.

“Just reminiscing,” Gladys’s replied. “It was so wonderful seeing those boys play together. I could barely tell them apart. I remember that one was very neat, while the other was a bit of a mess.”

“There were two boys living here?” I asked, confused.

“Yes, but only for a short time. Sorry, my memory is a bit hazy. Mr. Wells treated that boy like he was his own son, and he became such good friends with little Elizabeth.”

“Was that boy Samuel?”

“Oh, yes, that was his name.” Gladys said pointedly.

I thought back to the story Neil had told me “Do you remember when he died, I inquired?”

“Samuel died?” She looked at me confused. “Oh, yes, of course. Something happened, but I can’t remember what.”

I felt that Gladys was getting tired and doubted I would get any more information out of her than I had.

“That was very helpful.” I thanked her, rising up. Gladys gave me some food and a cup of coffee and I left her house with more questions than answers.

The drive back was a somber one and as I drove, I thought about Neil, Elizabeth, and the boy named Samuel. I found it odd that Gladys was saying Samuel was so beloved by Neil and Elizabeth's father, when the story Neil had told me had given such a different account. But perhaps Gladys was confused about what had happened.

When I got back into the city, I was about to drive to the mansion when I went past the police station and saw chaos erupting. Cops swarmed the place like locusts. Pulling over, I stepped out.

"What happened?" I asked a beat cop who was busy keeping civilians away.

"A cop was shot," He said seriously.

"Who?"

"A man named Clemens."

I froze. Surely it couldn't be the Clemens I had met at the cafe, but how many Clemens could exist in one police station, or even one city?

"Hey, this Clemens, he didn't happen to wear an old duster?"

"Yeah, how did you know?" The cop asked.

My head swam, someone had shot Clemens, but why would anyone do that? He was rude, but murdering him seemed extreme.

"Please," I said, "let me through, he's a friend." It wasn't a total lie.

"Sorry, were in the middle of an investigation." The cop said firmly. "Just stay out of the way and move along."

I nodded in agreement, while thinking of how to get around the barrier. People were everywhere, with cops running around in a panic. Covertly slipping through the barricade, I could see around some large canvas tarps. In the middle of the street a body lied sprawled with its arms spread out and pool of partially dried blood around it.

I felt sick to my stomach. There was blood everywhere, and Clemens laid in a heap. His eyes were wide open and his neck was bent so that he was staring straight up at the sky.

“Hey!” a voice called out behind me, nearly causing me to leap out of my skin. “Who the hell are you?” A gruff cop came barreling towards me. “I said no reporters! You’ll mess up my crime scene!”

“I’m sorry!” I yelled, turning quickly, “I just...”

“Hmm?” The gruff man said, stopping in front of my face. “A girl? It’s a bit cruel of them to send a lady in, isn’t it?”

I’ll admit I was scared, with this man leaning towards me, and the corpse on the ground behind me. Unsure of what to say, I tried to fight my way over the barrier rope. Suddenly a familiar voice called out.

“Hey, what are you doing here?”

“Neil?” I asked, looking up.

“Hey” he repeated. “You always seem to be finding your way into the middle of things, don’t you?”

“It’s just, I saw that there were police everywhere, and I got caught up in the moment.” I started to sob. I didn’t know why I was sobbing, I just felt like I had to cry. I was scared, I guess.

“Hey, I’m going to be a while, if you need to talk...” Neil began.

“No, I’m fine.” I responded, wiping my eyes, “I’m just going to go back to the house.” Neil nodded and I stepped away from the barrier, nearly bumping into a heavy-set cop on the way out. I took off down the street and decided the better route away from the station was along the waterfront.

That night I paced back and forth in my room. How could I sleep? Thoughts swam through my head and I felt like one of those fish, taken from my peaceful pond and thrown into a mighty river, my thoughts kept running and I couldn’t stop thinking about Clemens’ body.

Perhaps, I thought, it would be better to just let everything go. I could just forget it all, do my job and get on with my life. It would certainly seem to be the safer option. If I went too far, I could end up dead just like those two cops, lying in a puddle of my own blood. I shuddered at the thought.



I decided that I needed to go for a walk, the winter air was much cooler than it had been, but one of the wool coats that Elizabeth had gifted me would be substantial. Walking outside, I could see that the night was clear and Orion hung over me. Clear nights I found to be rare and so it seemed like such a treat when they did appear. However, I found in Seattle that the clearest nights were the coldest, and the cloudy nights were warmer. This was just another one of the things I had to get use to.

Suddenly, out of the corner of my eye, I spied a small window that was attached to a storage area off the kitchen of the mansion. Turning quickly, I stared at the foggy window, which was in an area of the house so ignored that now the white wall was covered with thick vines of ivy. I made my way through the bushes and crouched under the window that I saw was partially open.

Faintly, from inside I could hear Neil's voice. "I promise, I'll set everything right, and no one will ever know."

I could hear Elizabeth respond, "But, what about the girl, she was there today, right?"

"It's fine, she doesn't know anything."

"Are you sure?"

"Positive."

"I love you."

My hands clasped to my mouth, so that I would not gasp. I didn't know what the conversation was about, but it was so confusing, had they been talking about me? I decided that I needed to get away. I couldn't let Neil and Elizabeth know I had heard them talking. I made my way from the wall, hoping with all my heart that they wouldn't look outside. Suddenly, I felt something catch my foot and before I could stop myself, I fell with a large whump to the ground.

"Hey!" Neil's voice called out. But before he could look out the window to see me, I leaped into the bush, hiding amongst the branches.

"It was probably just a raccoon honey" I heard Elizabeth say.

I stayed in that bush, not daring to come out until I saw the little light in the window disappear.

## CHAPTER 6

### Abigail Discovers Evidence

The next day I was utterly exhausted. I hadn't slept well the night before, as you could imagine, and I'd hurt my foot when I tripped in the bushes.

"Feeling alright?" Elizabeth asked, as I limped my way downstairs. Her voice sounded like it always did, but somehow, I expected her to view me with suspicion.

"Yeah" I replied, nodding my head. "Good, did your talk with Gladys go well?"

"What?"

"You know, the reason I lent you my car."

"Oh, yeah...it went great!" After last night, I wasn't thinking about Gladys.

I decided that I needed to be more careful about how I acted in front of Elizabeth from then on. If I walked away from the maid job then, they would become suspicious. But, where would I go? They already had my home address. No, I realized that I had to see this through to the end, it was the only possibility.

I decided to find the room where the window was, but I waited a few days so as to not appear overly suspicious. What I never realized about these old Victorian houses was that there were many hidden rooms, and it wasn't surprising that I hadn't even been in the storage area where I overheard the conversation. Elizabeth was the only permanent non-servant, and she seemed to prefer to spend her time in the same rooms every day.

When Quinten was done with the afternoon lunch that day, I went through the kitchen and examined all of the doors. There was an exit into the sun room, and another door that led to the great room, but obviously, these didn't lead to any storage area. Since there weren't any other doors, I walked around to the outside of the house to where I had been standing the night before. Seeing that I had the

correct window, I went back inside. This time I found the corresponding wall, and then I noticed a wood trap door built into the wainscoting. Fortunately, I had small strong fingers and was able to pry the board open. Seeing that it led to a small set of stairs, I put the board back in place and decided to wait.

That night I snuck out again, a bit later, but before Adwell would arise. As I made my way down to the kitchen in my stockinged feet, I was worried that I wasn't going to remove the board quietly enough. Cautiously, I stuck my fingers in the grooves and it started to budge and I gently pulled it out and rested it against the wall. I put my feet on the cold steps and reached in to grab onto the metal railing.

At one point, the railing suddenly stopped, and I was going to have to find the rest of the way by using my hands and feet. The darkness hung around me, and I searched the walls, hoping to find a light switch. The stairs finally stopped, and I was standing on a cold damp floor. I reached out and touched the wall next to me, using my hands to feel along it. I was still look for a light switch, or at least a door. Instead, I found myself clutching at a cold piece of metal. Feeling around, it, I found that it was a ladder. Carefully, I pulled myself up and began to climb. Pushing open the trap door, I climbed up into the upper room.

It was mostly dark inside the room, but through the window I could see well enough by moonlight. I didn't dare turn on the light. A small pile of papers sat neatly on the table. Before I moved anything I noticed that the table was covered in a heavy dust, and I thought that I would need to be careful not to leave any fingerprints. I also noticed that there was no chair. It was as though they were using this room to keep old documents. There wasn't any heat in the room and I pulled my robe tighter around me. I kept thinking about the board against the kitchen wall, as I anxiously tried to decide where to start.

Reaching down I lifted a paper from the pile, holding it up to the moonlight to read. At the top of it was printed "Certificate of Death Washington State Board of Health." As I read further down the name "Neil William Wells" was handwritten onto it. The date read March 14, 1913. Neil was dead? Wait, was it the same Neil? I picked up the next paper down in the stack. Written on it was

“Official Adoption Papers of Samuel Hale. Arthur Wells is officially the legal guardian of Samuel Hale, until the point where either party passes or Samuel Hale reaches the legal age of majority.” At the bottom of the document was a photo of a blond boy, who looked like an older version of the boy in the photo I had found in Elizabeth’s room.

I started to wish that there was a place to sit down where there was no dust. Why was there a death certificate for someone who was clearly still alive? I was so confused. I thought back to the Neil that I knew, the one who had shown me the koi fish and who had rescued me at the Merchant’s Cafe. But, why was there a death certificate for him?

Suddenly, I heard someone walking on the gravel outside. My heart raced and I hastily crept down the ladder and up the cellar steps. I squeezed through the door and rolled out onto the kitchen floor. I laid there for a couple of seconds and made sure that no one had heard me before I ran to the center staircase and back up to my room.

The next morning while I got dressed, I thought about what to do next. First, I needed to know if the man named Neil Wells, whomever he was, was really dead. Before I had left the storage room, I noted that his death certificate had written on it that he was buried at Mt. Pleasant Cemetery in 1913, and decided that visiting it would be my best course of option.

Knowing that the cemetery would be closed after dark forced me to wait until the next Saturday to visit. I pulled out the trolley schedule and figured out what time would work, since there weren’t that many trollies on Saturday. The cemetery was located in the north part of the city and the trolley travelled along the Alaskan Highway to reach it. The graveyard was large, with swaying trees dotted over a grassy landscape. I was dismayed at having to search through so many tombstones for a single name, but suddenly one memorial stone caught my attention. How could it not? It was massive.

A man sat on top of a steed holding aloft a large sword. The statue was solid bronze. The marker below read “HERE LIES ARTHUR WELLS 1858-

1913,” and underneath it was something written in Latin. Next to the statue, the other graves felt quaint by comparison. Adjacent to it, I found another tombstone that read, “SAMUEL HALE WELLS, Beloved Son, 1900-1913.” On the tomb was the image of an angel embracing a young child. Kneeling down to look closer, I saw that the tombstone etching on the child’s grave looked much newer than the father’s, even though they had both passed in the same year.

The more important thing was that the name on this child’s grave did not match with the name on the death certificate. Which one was real? Was either real? Thinking about it, I realized that the information hidden in the secret room would be more likely to be true, as why would someone hide a lie? Considering how the dates on the death certificate for Neil Wells that I had looked at in the storage room were the same as the dates on this tombstone, I realized that the body that lay under my feet was most likely him. But why would someone change the name on the grave, and if Neil was truly dead, then who was the Neil that I knew?

I thought about where to go next. The hidden room had provided the most clues, but it was risky and I wasn’t sure what I needed anyway. The police? No, I didn’t know for sure there was a crime.

I needed to know why Neil was acting so evasive about the Winchester murder. I thought back to that article again. What about the fisherman? Sure, it would be a stretch but there’s a chance he saw something that didn’t end up in the article. It’s not like I had any other leads. Making a plan to find him, I plucked a small daisy from the grass and left it at the foot of Neil’s grave before making my way back to the trolley stop.

## CHAPTER 7

### The Fisherman's Clue

A few days later, I found myself standing at the pier. The strong smell of fish was rancid and it was bitterly cold. My hands curled up inside my thin gloves. I imagine I looked the strangest sight, standing there with my fancy hat and long skirt. Still, no one seemed to pay me any mind as I stood looking around for any sign of the crab fisherman. As time dragged by however, I began to feel that this had been a dumb idea. There had been a photo of the man next to the article, so I knew what he looked like, but I had no proof he would be here today. What if he took the day off? What if he went to another pier? Maybe he had decided to stop fishing?

Deciding I had made a mistake, I elected to leave when out of the corner of my eye I spotted a pair of fishermen stepping off of a boat. One of them donned the same heavy oil cloth coat as the man in the newspaper. "Hey! Hey!" I called out waving frantically at them. The man in the coat finally turned and seemed to notice me for a moment before returning to helping his partner unload the baskets. I decided to run over and get his attention directly, and as I approached; I heard the fisherman's friend say something to him in a language I couldn't understand while pointing at me. Looking up the fisherman caught my gaze and with a nod began to make his way toward me.

"Ah, it's always nice to be approached by a pretty young woman," he said kindly with an accent. Seeing his face in clearer view, I could see that he was Japanese, and realized the language I had heard must have been his native tongue. Wiping his hand on his pants he reached it out to me. He smelled strongly of crab. "I'm Johnny Tanaka, what can I do for you?" he asked as I took his hand. His grip was rather loose.

"Well." I started, becoming a bit nervous. "I read the article about the body you found and..."

Mr. Tanaka cut me off. "Perhaps we had better go somewhere else."

A short time later I found myself waiting for him in a small coffee shop next to the waterfront. There were people wandering down the wooden path in front of us. After about twenty minutes the door swung open and Mr. Tanaka walked in.

He had changed into a pressed but worn tan suit and a dark brown hat. “Sorry for making you wait,” he said, sitting across from me.

“It’s not a problem,” I responded.

A waitress came up and asked if he would like anything.

“Tea?” he asked. Nodding the waitress walked off carrying a menu with her.

“So, you want to know about the day that I found the body?” he inquired, leaning forward on the table.

I nodded.

“Are you a reporter?” He eyed me with suspicion.

“No, just a concerned family member of one of the investigating officers.” I told him.

“Well...I’m not sure what I can tell you, outside of repeating what I told the paper.”

“I was just wondering if maybe you saw anything else, something that seemed unimportant? Maybe something you thought wasn’t worth mentioning? Something you forgot about at the time and didn’t tell the police?”

The man leaned back in his chair and put his finger on his chin. “Well,” he started. “There is something but I was told not to say anything about it.”

I tried to remain casual and said in a low voice, “what was it?”

Mr. Tanaka seemed a bit worried.

“The police told me not to say anything,” he apologized.

No, I decided, this wasn’t an option, I needed this information. If I lost the thread here, I may never regain it.

“Wait!” I exclaimed as Mr. Tanaka was getting up to leave. “Isn’t there any way I could convince you to tell me? Please, I’m begging you, a friend of mine might be in trouble and if you know something it could make a difference.”

He looked down on me with something resembling pity. “What type of trouble is your friend in?”

“I don’t really know,” I admitted.

Mr. Tanaka scoffed and began making his way towards the door, I considered my options before rushing to stop him from leaving.

“Look, I’ll make a deal with you. If I buy you breakfast, will you tell me what you know?”

At this, the fisherman laughed. It was a hearty laugh. “You seem to have a good sense of how to get on a person’s good side,” he responded. “There is a nice restaurant in an alley not too far from here, I can meet you there. Its relatively unknown, so we’ll be able to talk in peace.”

He gave me specific instructions on where to meet him and we wandered off in different directions, he was insistent on this. When we met again, I found him sitting in the restaurant with a massive meal in front of him. Most of it didn’t appear to be anything I would consider breakfast, a bowl of some type of soup, and cuts of fish lay on his plate, along with big heaps of rice. However, it did look expensive. I hoped this information was worth the cost.

He made me wait until he was finished eating.

“Now tell me what you promised,” I demanded.

“The only thing I know is this” he said, picking his teeth with a toothpick, “the dead man had something in his pocket. I don’t have it with me, but it was a sort of handkerchief, dark blue, and with a golden A embroidered on it. It was jagged on one end, and across the edge was half of what looked like an H.”

“Was that it?” I asked, hoping that he knew something else.

Mr. Tanaka nodded. “Yep, that’s all I know.” He got up from the table and put his hat on. Tipping it to me, he walked out of the restaurant, leaving me to pay the check.



Getting the information had been expensive and now I was tasked with figuring out why the police were so insistent on hiding an old piece of cloth. My family had always told me to trust the police, but frankly that was becoming difficult. The more I learned, the more it seemed as though the beliefs I had grown up with were slowly eroding around me and I was left wondering what was real and who to trust. I needed to see the blue handkerchief, there was simply no other option. But if the police had taken it, what chance was there of me getting ahold of it?

Even more importantly, why did I need to see it? It was at that moment that I realized something. I'd been trying to tell myself that I had to see this through, that there was no other option. But that wasn't it was it? It wasn't fear that kept me going, nor compassion that fueled my actions. It was simply my own curiosity, plain and simple. I just wanted to see how the story ends. Knowing this, I made up my mind. I was going to break into the police station. Not because I had to, but simply because it was what I desired.

## CHAPTER 8

### Abigail Breaks In

I didn't bother hiding the signs of my break-in. The officers on duty didn't come to this part of the station at night, and they could deal with a broken window. Besides, I had no intention of taking anything so this wasn't technically a burglary. If my grandma knew I was doing this she would be ashamed. My goal was to search the evidence locker room and find the evidence from the Adam Winchester case. I hoped that the handkerchief Mr. Tanaka had mentioned would be in there. When I had been in the waiting area before, I had watched one of the officers walk in and place a large bag of evidence into a set of locked metal doors. Now as I stood in the room, I perused the roughly written labels in the metal slots as I walked down the aisle. Starting at the far-left corner, I saw that they began in January and ended in December. There were several that covered the month of March. At least six of them were of the most recent murder cases, but I also noticed one was labelled March 5, 1912. I thought it was interesting that such an old case was still open.

I went back to the doors with May 15, 1928 scribbled on them. I opened the first door and it slid open easily. Using the light from the window, I peered in. I took out large canvas bags that held a man's coat and pants. The blood stains had dried and were just dark brown blotches. I went through the pockets, but found nothing. There was a small bag that had a pair of spectacles in it, I wasn't aware that the cop named Adam had actually worn glasses. I went through each and every item and then put it back in the bags the way I had found them, but I still hadn't discovered any handkerchief. When I finished with Adam Winchester's evidence locker, I went to look in Clemens', but still had no luck. Where was it? I began bending down and looking under the lockers, maybe it had gotten dropped?

Suddenly I heard a voice shout out "Hey, what's going on here?"

My breath caught in my throat. A light beam shined from the shattered window and passed overhead, as I hid behind a desk. I made myself crouch down tighter and held my breath. I could hear the man's footsteps outside, then I heard the sound of keys rattling in the door, and finally, the light swept the room again.

"Is someone in here?" the voice called out. Suddenly a bright light burned my eyes, I realized he must have hit the light switch. It was at this point I surmised that I was trapped, he was between me and the door, and the wall was behind me. All I could do was to look up sheepishly as he glared down at me from above the desk.

He placed me in a holding cell. After he told me that we had to wait for the processing clerk, I sat with my head in my hands as he looked at me through the bars of my cell. He was an older man with a bald head and he had a look less of anger, and more of disappointment like I was a dog he had caught peeing on the rug.

"What I want to know is who breaks into a police station? There are easier places to rob you know."

"I wasn't trying to steal anything," I began. He cut me off.

"Quiet, I'm talking." I decided to shut up.

"Now, I've been a cop for a good while now, and in all my years I've never met anyone who actually tried to break into the station. Honestly, what were you thinking?"

It took me a moment to realize I could talk. But what was I to tell him? If the police were hiding something, I would be the last person that they would confess to. This guy was a hard-nosed rank and file type and anything I said would just confirm that I was poking in where I shouldn't have been.

"It was a dare." I lied.

"A dare?"

I let my eyes well with tears, it wasn't difficult. He was right, most wouldn't even think of breaking into a police station, it was foolish, so why not lean on that?

"Yes," I continued. "My friends dared me to break in. I'm so sorry."

I began to cry in earnest, thick sloppy tears flowing down my cheeks.

I could see the cop's features began to soften.

"You must have a daughter?" I asked. I took a chance here, but it couldn't hurt. "You must know what it's like."

He gave a long deep sigh. "Well, you're not out of the woods yet, but I don't see any reason to keep you in that drafty cell."

He made tea. That was nice of him. I sat across from him, holding the mug and blowing into it. I wish I had some sugar, but I didn't think it would be a good idea to ask for that.

"What's your name?" he asked.

"Jane, Jane Barlow," I lied, praying he wouldn't ask for my ID.

"Well, Miss Barlow. You've certainly got yourself into a heap of trouble here."

I nodded apologetically.

"You're lucky it was me, some of the younger guys might not be so friendly," he continued.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Eh, they can get overzealous at times. Like a few days ago, see, we had this one guy, normally a nice guy. See, his partner got killed, shot right outside the station actually and well, I suppose I can't blame him, that would put anyone on edge."

"Wait, what was his name?"

"Name? Oh Neil, Neil Wells."

I leaned forward.

"So," he continued. "I was searching our officer's body in the street when I found something in his pocket. It didn't look like much just a handkerchief or something. Blue, I think, with some formal lettering on it. But Neil, he snatches it out of my hands like it was made of solid gold. Isn't that the strangest thing?"

"That is weird," I tried to sound disinterested. I silently wondered if that had happened before or after I had seen Neil that day, he certainly didn't appear angry when I met him. The old policeman gave me a look of regret.

“I’m sorry. That story might have been a bit disturbing for a girl like you. I assured him that it was no trouble and that his story was actually making me feel better. He seemed to like that, and within a few minutes he had written out a ticket to me for loitering, charged me a small fine, and sent me home in a taxi. This was good, because I didn’t want to be seen pulling up in front of Elizabeth’s in a police car.

When I walked into the house it was already early morning and Elizabeth was sitting in the dining room having breakfast. “I was out at the speak-easies,” I lied.

“Oh you, naughty girl you,” she replied with a laugh.

I hoped my laugh in return seemed sincere, and I thought that maybe she believed we had finally found something to bond over.

As I walked upstairs, I realized that there was only one thing left to do. I needed to know if Neil had the blue handkerchief, and where he was hiding it. That friendly cop had said nothing of an “A” or half an “H” on it, but if they were there... This would require some ingenuity on my part, or what my grandma use to call “using my noggin.” I was sure that she would be really disappointed in my criminal activities.

I quickly realized that breaking into Neil’s apartment would not be so simple as breaking into the station or the storage room. It was on the corner of the block and in plain view of the street. The next Saturday, I got lucky and overheard that Neil and Elizabeth were going to a show that night and that he was picking her up at the mansion. This would give me plenty of time to get down to his apartment, break in, and get out.

I took the trolley part of the way to Neil’s apartment and walked the rest. Staring up at the side of the brick building, I grew anxious. Climbing the wall wasn’t going to work, it was slick brick. Besides if someone were to peek out their window or walk by on the street, it would be difficult to explain. I would have to go through the front. The iron gates were my first obstacle and the same

guard that had let me in the first time was sitting in his guardhouse like Cerberus guarding the opening of Hell.

While I had tried to find a way around the guard, a shiny Model T pulled up, and he stepped out of his station. He started talking in a quiet voice to the person in the car. The guard seemed to be enjoying himself, though I could not make out what they were saying. Eventually the driver parked and he and the guard started walking down the street. I realized this was my chance.

The guard station sat just a little above the lower end of the gate. I grabbed the edge of the roof and, with a grunt, yanked myself up before swinging my legs over and landing on my side. Luckily years of farm work had given me enough strength to pull myself onto the guardhouse roof. I awkwardly rose to my feet, trying to get used to the slant of the roof. Having adjusted my stance, I began to walk carefully as possible.

KLANK!

My eyes went wide as the sound reverberated. The roof was made of grey terracotta tiles. I stopped and stood as still as possible, hoping with all my heart that the guard was still distracted. I peered down the street, where he had walked, but the only observer was a small cat under a street lamp. Crawling seemed like the best option, and I softly made my way across, being careful to distribute my weight as much as possible. Once I reached the edge of the roof, the gate stood to the side a few feet away from me. The gap here seemed so much larger than it did on the ground. Steeling myself, I tensed my legs and with all my might, leapt like a jackrabbit. I soared over the gate, the hem of my skirt just barely clearing the top and landed on the other side.

A shudder went up through my body as I landed. I felt like I did when I jumped from the old oak tree as a child, but the concrete felt far less forgiving than grass. Rising myself up, I looked behind me at the gate, the guard had still not returned. My path took me past the koi, and I glanced down to see their colors reflect off the water. They innocently danced in their pond, unconcerned with the world around them.

The door to the building was unlocked but it was thick and heavy. No one was at the front desk, which was lit by a banker's lamp. I remembered that I did not even know what Neil's apartment number was, and it wasn't like I could try every apartment in the building. Leaning over the desk, I discovered that there was a sheet of paper with a list of names and numbers on a clipboard. Snatching the clipboard up, I scanned the names down until I finally came across "Neil Wells-Room 208" at the very bottom.

"That was easier than expected," I thought.

When I got up the stairs, I knew that time was of the essence. I couldn't risk getting seen breaking in by another one of the tenants. When I was working at the Idaho fair, my brother managed to lose the key to his prize pig's pen. We were all in a panic until my grandpa pulled out one of his playing cards and slipped it between the gate's latch and the post. When he did this, the gate swung open. If Neil hadn't locked the deadbolt, then my grandpa's trick might work again. Reaching into my pocket I realized that I still had the card that Elizabeth had given me with Gladys' address written on it. After a few attempts, I managed to push the card in between the latch and frame, and pulled the card to the left so that the lock pushed forward. I heard a click sound and pulled the door open.

The place was a mess, there were piles of clothing and old papers strewn around the floor. The stench of cigarette smoke hung in the air and through an opening I could see unwashed plates crowding the kitchen sink.

"How can someone live like this?" I thought to myself, as I tried to reconcile the neat and clean image of Neil in my mind with what I was seeing in the apartment. I had hoped that finding the handkerchief would be simple, but first I had to figure out where to start searching. I decided the coat closet was the best place to begin, and I felt through all of his coat and suit pockets, but the only handkerchief I found was red with a large silver "N" on it.

On a coffee table sat a few newspapers and I thought that perhaps the handkerchief had fallen under them. As I lifted the uppermost paper, the headline on the one below it caught my eye. It was dated March 6, 1912. "Why keep such an old paper?" I thought to myself. Picking it up, I read:

## LOCAL OFFICER MURDERED: YOUNG SON ORPHANED!

*According to local authorities, alcohol enforcement officer Abraham Hale was killed, having been stabbed while investigating underground alcohol shipments in our city. He leaves his young son Samuel behind as his sole heir. The only clue officers have is a piece of blue handkerchief with half an H and a A on it in gold lettering. It appears to have been torn in half down the middle and police believe that finding the other half might help lead them to the guilty party.*

Looking back at the date, I thought to myself, “1912, 1912” where had I seen that before? Then it struck me, back at the police station’s evidence room—the one drawer that didn’t fit in with the rest. The locker, the handkerchief and the newspaper article were all tied together. That’s why Neil was so interested in the handkerchief, he was the boy in the article. A and H were his father’s initials.

I thought the best place to go was back to the mansion, so that I could wait for Neil and Elizabeth to return. I looked out the window, but could not tell if the guard had come back. As I left the room, I carefully closed the door behind me and pulled my cloak up. I was tempted to run quickly through the gate, but wanted to avoid drawing suspicion to myself. So, I walked carefully and calmly pushing the gate open, made sure to avoid the guard’s eyesight. Once I was a bit further away, I pulled down my hood and hailed a late-night taxi.



## CHAPTER 9

### Abigail Learns the Truth

When I reached the mansion, the place was dark. I pushed my key into the side kitchen door and carefully opened it. “Hello?” I said, peering inside. It was quiet, and I could hear the echo of my footsteps on the tile. Soon, I came to the drawing room where Elizabeth was sipping something from a tall thin glass.

“Abigail,” she said as if she expected me. “Have a seat.” She motioned to the tapestry covered couch where I had sat when we had first met.

“I have just one question, but I think I know the answer,” I said, sitting down. “Who is Neil Wells?”

“If you’re asking that, you must know the man you met here is not my real brother.”

I nodded.

Elizabeth looked away. “Neil was my brother, my real brother. My father had adopted Samuel after his father was killed; it would be good press for him. Neil and my father both died of typhoid fever. Afterwards, me and Samuel were raised by Quinten.

When Samuel turned eighteen, he left and I thought I would never see him again. However, he returned shortly later and convinced me to let him use my brother’s identity so that he could enter the police force without anyone knowing who he really was. He wanted to figure who his father’s murderers were so that he could get revenge.”

“Why did you go along with this?” I asked.

“After my father and brother passed, Quinten and Samuel became the only family I had in the world. I was heartbroken when Sam left, and I would have done anything to keep him around, so when he came back and asked for my help, how could I refuse? I realized that we needed to hide his identity. Changing the grave was the easy part, we simply had a new tombstone made and switched them out.”

“But did no one notice that Neil and Samuel had switched?”

“Neil and Samuel looked amazingly alike, same hair, same height, same blue eyes. All I had to do was have a fake death certificate made up and switched out for the real one.”

“And you hid the real one away in the storage room.”

“I couldn’t bring myself to get rid of it. I still loved my brother.”

“Why didn’t you keep any pictures of him?” I asked.

“I tried to, but the guilt started to drive me mad. I saw his eyes judging me in every picture, eventually I was compelled to hide them away. I was also afraid that if anyone looked too closely, they would start to see the little differences between them that I saw.”

“Samuel told me that you met him on a trip downtown, was any of that true?”

“In a sense,” Elizabeth responded, “he’s always given that story, a partial lie is easier to believe than a total one. He merely switched who he was in those events. Elizabeth put down her drink. “Don’t worry about me, Abigail Smith, and I’m sorry but I have to let you go.” She snorted to herself.

“Where are you going to go?” I asked.

“I plan to leave the city tonight. Me and Samuel will meet up again when things have calmed down and everyone has forgotten these events.”

“Elizabeth” I demanded. “Where is Samuel? He never came back to the apartment.” Elizabeth considered for a moment before replying, “I can’t see how telling you would cause us any issues. We always liked to play in the underground as children, and Samuel told me that he’d use the tunnels to sneak out of the city when his revenge was complete.”

“Can you tell me where to find my way into the tunnels?” I asked her.

“There is an entrance by the Merchant’s Cafe,” Elizabeth told me. I thanked her for the information and walked out of the mansion, knowing that I would likely never see her again.

I ran all the way down the street to where the cafe stood, where I had first met Neil all those weeks ago. Looking around, I could not find anything resembling an entrance to the tunnels, and thought I might need to ask for better directions. When I walked into the cafe, Louis was helping another customer, but he saw that I was in a hurry and came over.

“Is there a way to get into the underground around here?” I asked.

“Why do you want to know? Those tunnels aren’t safe.” Louis told me.

“I need to find Neil Wells, its urgent.”

“Well, I’ve noticed him going down into the tunnels a lot lately, I can show you the entrance he uses.”

After telling the cook he’d be right back, Louis guided me across the street and pointed at a white painted wooden door. “It’s right through there,” he said.

“Thanks.” I said and he nodded at me before returning to the cafe.

Opening the door, I stared into the darkness, I felt like Orpheus preparing to step into Hades.

Right as Abigail was about to describe the end of her story, a porter’s loud voice interrupted with, “We are now entering Idaho!”

The veteran glanced up at the porter and then refocused on Abigail, “you surprise me, I wouldn’t expect someone of your age and situation to know Orpheus’ tragedy.”

“I took a class on Greek myth and history in college,” Abigail responded.

“Knowing that, you must have been determined to not look back.”

“I felt like if I did, I’d never learn the truth.”

He motioned for her to continue, and she began again.

## CHAPTER 10

### The Tunnels

There were intermittent rays of light from above as I worked my way through the winding passageways. A damp heaviness hung in the air, and ground was bumpy. Thick wooden beams held up the ceiling, and brick walls to my left gave way to large archways leading into desolate rooms beyond. As I ran by, I could see remnants of former shops, like broken down signs, and abandoned merchandise. A light shined down above me and illuminated a broken doll lying nearby. I realized that the light came from the glass blocks I had seen above.

As I reached the final archway before the corner turned, I looked in to see the light of a burning cigarette. Moving closer I saw that it was Neil, or should I say Samuel? He was wearing the same suit that he had worn to pick up Elizabeth.

“Hello,” he said, his voice was flat and monotone. He was sitting on a metal chair in the middle of the room, a half-empty brown bottle sat on the ground next to him.

“Samuel...” my voice caught in my throat.

“I suppose I’ve underestimated you, Miss Smith. How did you figure it out?”

“I first became curious when I found the photograph of you.”

“Did you not believe my answer at the fish pond?” Samuel asked.

“I did, until I decided to go and visit Gladys, and found that Samuel Hale hadn’t died like you had told me. Even though Gladys’ memory isn’t as good as it once was, she did tell me that the two boys that she knew looked remarkably alike. So, I knew that it was possible that you had taken Neil’s place. Later on, I discovered in the storage room that Neil had passed and that you had been adopted by Elizabeth’s father.”

“Is that all you know?”

“Not quite. At first, I had no reason to connect you to any murders, but after talking with the fisherman, I came to know about the handkerchief. I heard

from him that Clemens had taken it, and I went to the police station to try and find it. Of course, it wasn't there. Luckily, the jailor at the station talks too much and he told me that you had taken it off of Clemens' body. I didn't know at that point what the significance of it was, but when I saw the newspaper article in your apartment, I figure out that half of it was taken from your father's murder scene. The final question, that I think I already know the answer to is did you kill Clemens and Winchester?"

"I did."

"But, why didn't you just tell the other police what you knew?"

"This city isn't what you think it is. On the outside it's green and shiny with fancy stores and people driving around in new cars. But underneath all that is just greed. My father worked as an alcohol enforcement officer, and he refused to be bought. When he heard a few cops were taking bribes to keep quiet about some illegal shipments, his conscience wouldn't allow him to ignore it. I was there when they shot him, twelve-years-old, hiding behind a stack of crates so that I couldn't see their faces. I could hear them as they struggled with the gun; I heard the gunshot; and I heard my father's lifeless body fall onto the crates."

"I'm sorry." I responded.

"The truth is, Samuel Hale died that day, along with my father. All I had left of him was half of his old handkerchief, it had been torn in the struggle."

"But how did you learn who your father's killers were?" I asked.

Neil looked up at me. "You see Winchester was a drunkard, and he tended to talk about old cases whenever he fell off the wagon. One night, when we were drinking together in a speak-easy, he pulled out his wallet to pay and a blue handkerchief fell out and dropped to the floor. I wouldn't have realized what it was, but in his drunkenness, he used it to clean the smudge off his spectacles, giving me a clear view of the gold A. I followed him down to the pier where I shot him over the waterfront. But I made a mistake. I killed him too close to the berm and the force of the shot sent him sprawling over the side."

I realized this must have been the footprints I had seen on the dock.

"But why did he hold onto the handkerchief?" I asked.

Neil scoffed at me, “Winchester had a habit of keeping items from old cases, he probably didn’t see a difference there.”

“And Clemens, when did you find out about him?”

“Clemens was always a lazy cop, so when I saw that he had checked in to the evidence room for my father’s case, I knew something was wrong. Unfortunately, Clemens reached Winchester’s body before I had a chance to. I figured out who he was when I learned that the piece of handkerchief on Winchester’s body had never been placed in the evidence locker.”

I realized from his story that while he had been chasing Winchester and Clemens, I had been chasing him.

Suddenly a voice called out from above. “This is the police, whoever is down there, come out slowly!” I knew we didn’t have much time until they started coming into the tunnel.

“You aren’t afraid?” Neil asked, with some surprise.

“No.” I stated firmly.

Samuel laughed at this.

“Why are you laughing?” I asked.

“It’s just funny,” Samuel said, “I’d be terrified if I was alone with a murderer. To hear you say you aren’t afraid, it just seems so ridiculous. Now then, how do you think this is going to end?”

I was scared. He had already killed two people, why wouldn’t he kill me? While talking he had moved to block the entrance, cutting off my escape. I glanced around to see if there was another way out and he seemed to notice this. He pulled out a revolver and lifted it up. I was shaking and my hands clammed up.

“You’re the only one who knows the truth.” He said, pointing the gun at me. “The truth is, I’m afraid to die as well. I guess it’s true that conscience does make cowards of us all.”

I swallowed my fear, “Sam, even if you kill me, it’s over. You’re trapped.”

“I have a boat coming.” Sam told me. “By the time they get down here, I’ll be on my way to Canada.”

“That’s why you were waiting here?”

“Yes, they’ll be watching the docks, but I’ve spent the last several years digging my own way to the surface. All I have to do is climb up this ladder when the proper time comes and I’m home free.” He pointed to a rope ladder that hung from the ceiling.

I noticed he had left his bottle on the floor and before he could react, I snatched it up and lobbed it at him. It struck him in the face, breaking and blinding him.

“Shit!” he exclaimed, wiping broken glass away from his eyes. I lunged forward and wrapped my hands around the gun. We struggled for a few moments, the weapon’s nozzle sliding against both our bodies. Suddenly there was a loud bang.

The sound was louder than I had expected and I looked down to see if I was shot. I’ve heard that when you get shot it doesn’t hurt immediately. Realizing that I was fine, I looked up to see Samuel staggering, a large stain of blood forming on his chest. The gun dropped from his hand and clattered to the ground.

Struggling forward, Samuel collapsed onto me. “Tell Elizabeth, I’m sorry.”

His body stood for a moment that seemed to draw out into eternity before slipping between my arms and onto the ground.

Laying Samuel’s body down, I placed his jacket over his face. As I did so, I noticed a piece of blue cloth sticking out from his pocket, and reaching in, discovered the two pieces of handkerchief. I thought for a moment, before placing them back. Rubbing my hands together, I began to climb the rope ladder, eventually shoving open a wooden trap door to reveal the cool night air. Pulling myself up, I collapsed onto a pile of dirt in an alleyway, I saw that it was the same place where I had talked to Mr. Tanaka. A bit away I could see a small boat pulling up to the coastline. I wondered how long they would wait for him.

Samuel’s death was ruled a suicide. The police had already been on his trail and it was believed he took his life in the tunnels as an easy way out. I

managed to convince Adwell to let me in to get my stuff from the mansion, he seemed quite shaken. I later learned that Louis had called the police after I had gone into the underground, concerned for my safety. I couldn't blame him for this.

A few months went by and I found myself sitting outside at the Merchant's Cafe. As I sipped my drink under the awning, I spied a familiar face approaching. Squinting, I did not realize who it was until I heard the voice say, "Abigail?"

"Gladys," I responded recognizing her raspy voice. She walked up to me and adjusted the tan cloche she was wearing.

"I knew it must have been you," she remarked. "How have you been?"

"Why are you here?" I asked, surprised.

"Oh, I come down here every couple months, to get my hair done. Did you hear about what happened in the tunnels? It's a shame about that man."

I nodded. I briefly considered explaining to her the truth about Neil and Samuel, but quickly decided that it would be too difficult to make her understand.

The next day, I finished packing and walked down to King Street Station. I wanted to return home to the familiar sight of Idaho, and back to my family's farm. As I walked through the street to the station, I could see children playing and people selling wares in market stalls. Truthfully, I did not believe that the city was as corrupt as Samuel said, but I still longed for home.

When the train arrived, I looked back one more time at the bustling station I had arrived at so long ago, before stepping on and letting the doors close behind me.



## EPILOGUE

“So, here I am,” Abigail finished and looked matter-of-factly at the old man. “What do you think?”

He leaned forward on his cane. “With a story like that it’s no wonder you have that look. But, my dear girl, you’re still young, you shouldn’t believe everyone is like that. Those who believe the world to be perfect collapse when anything bad happens, and those who believe the world to be cruel don’t even bother getting out of bed. Watch who you trust, but don’t feel that you need to hate everyone.”

Abigail thought about what the old man said and thought back to how naive she had been when she had first arrived at the city. Everything looked so different now.

At that moment, the veteran stood up and said, “I’m making my way to the cafe if you’d care to join me?” When they came to the counter, he ordered a black coffee. “How much do I owe?” he asked the server.

“There’s no charge.” The man behind the counter said, “My father fought in the war, I’m not going to charge a veteran.”

“Well, if that’s the case, then you shouldn’t charge her either,” the old man said, pointing to me.

The man behind the counter looked confused, but I had to laugh.

## Afterword

When I first started writing my thesis, I was completely unaware of how it was going to end up once it was finished. Perhaps the most important thing I learned from this process is just how much a book can change while it is being written. In this way, it is almost like the novel writes itself, as if the characters push themselves forward while the author merely describes their actions. Since I started this project last fall, a number of themes came about that both influenced me and the finished product. This includes books and authors who I gained inspiration and knowledge from, techniques and skills in writing I learned both from my Creative Writing classes and through the thesis process, and finally things I noticed while doing revisions and editing that changed the overall structure of the story.

There are three main reasons why I set this novel in Seattle. The first is that having grown up in the city, I am closely familiar with how the city looks and feels. While it has, of course, changed since the 1920s, the basic structure and many of the buildings (especially those in the Pioneer Square area) remain. Knowing little details helped me to make the world Abigail encountered feel more real, like how she reacts to the rain, or the cold nights. The second reason I chose Seattle was due to the tunnel system. I wanted to conclude my novel with a sort of symbolic descent into the underworld, a more realistic version of Greek heroes' journeys into Hades. The Seattle Underground tunnels were perfect for this, since at the time I set the story, they were closed off from tourism, and their location and darkness created a sense of creepiness. The final reason why I set my novel in Seattle was that I wanted a major U.S. city that was not already overused in popular culture. Seattle doesn't come up a lot in stories, and I felt that using the location in my story would provide a sense of originality to the piece.

Outside of the novel's physical setting, the time period was also highly important. I incorporated a number of details from the late 1920s time period, which guided some of the main character's actions and how they treated my

protagonist. The first and most major way in which the time period affected the story was in imagining how a woman would have to negotiate her way through the events. During that time, women were not taken seriously as detective types, and so rather than ignoring that part of history, I used it to give my protagonist an advantage. Because she is a young woman in the 1920s, no one views her as a real threat until it is too late. The second way in which the time period affects the novel, is through the characters clothing and material items, and the buildings and structure of the city. I wanted my characters to all wear clothing which was true to the time period while also revealing something about their personality and economic situation in life. I think the best example of this is in how my two main female leads of Abigail and Elizabeth contrast with one another. Abigail, being from a lower middleclass farming community, dresses simply with cotton skirts that have pockets for important items, while Elizabeth, being from a rich upper-class family, dresses more stylishly and in a way that plays up her sexual appeal, with a dress that is similar to something a flapper might wear. To create this setting, I had to do a lot of research and reading about the 1920's and make sure that I did not accidentally incorporate modern items into the story. If I wasn't sure if an item existed, I simply left it out, so that I didn't mislead or confuse my readers.

Writing this thesis was the first time I had attempted to tackle a mystery story and I did not have a lot of experience with the genre. As such, I found myself needing to refer to a number of other stories to fully understand how a mystery plot works. Some of the most influential works I studied were the writings of Agatha Christie and Sir Author Conan Doyle. I also read the old Nancy Drew novels from the 1930's, which were very helpful since I also was using a young female protagonist. While there are definite similarities between my work and those writers, I thought about what I wanted to make different in this story. As opposed to the experienced detectives of Agatha Christie and Doyle, I wished to craft a protagonist who was intelligent and adventurous, yet who was also imperfect and lacking in experience. While a traditional detective story typically involves the investigator being an outside force who controls the solution of the story, I sought to craft a protagonist who was malleable and highly

influenced by the situations that she finds herself in. In this way, I felt that Abigail could make mistakes, and get confused, but still solve the mystery in the end.

The final major influence that I took to craft my novel were from Alfred Hitchcock films. I wanted to create the same sense of confusion and mystery that some of Hitchcock's protagonists found themselves in. For example, in the movie, "North by Northwest" Carey Grant spends large amounts of the plot confused about what is going on, but the viewer follows along with the character until the solution at the end. I also used Hitchcock films as a basis for what I wanted my character to look like, taking inspiration from his female protagonists to craft her looks and bits of her personality. For this story, I actually roughly based Abigail on the character of Barbara Morton in "Strangers on a Train," played by Hitchcock's daughter, Patricia. This character was rather plain, but smart and she helps guide the story's plot. I also liked the fact that Hitchcock could create mystery, even when there is no mystery to solve, just by placing the suspense in the right spots. Finally, the other way I used Hitchcock's work, along with films in general was by analyzing a film's story structure and studying how films develop their characters in a relatively short amount of time. This guided me in writing and deciding what I should keep and get rid of in order to maximize suspense and craft as full a narrative as possible. These influences were highly helpful when I began writing my story.

When I first began this story, I was unused to writing a long form narrative, having only written short stories and scripts. Because of this, I had to adjust my approach towards writing and focus on giving my characters development, while at the same time progressing the story forward. I tried my best to make sure that no sentence was wasted, and that every line progressed story, showed character, or revealed something about the world. The advice of not only my thesis advisor and professors but also the other students has been invaluable towards this goal. Since by having them read the story and hearing their reactions to it, I was able to see where my plot was confusing, overly busy, or needed more character information. I find that in writing a story, we often

forget to include necessary details, because to us, as the writer, they are obvious. However, having someone else read your story pulls you out of your own ego and forces you to see the plot from another's perspective. The advice of the other students was especially important due to the type of story this was.

Besides being the first long term story, I have written, this was also the first mystery plot I have penned. I found that mystery plots have a slightly different structure than many other stories, as the largest parts of the story have occurred before the reader picks up the book, and the point where the reader comes in is merely the revelation of the story. Because of this, I see Samuel rather than Abigail as the story's main character as he is the one whose actions create the plot. However, because I needed to set up clues that Abigail could discover that would lead her to a logical conclusion, I quickly discovered that my typical way of writing, which was to not know how the story was going to progress until I had written it, would not work. I taught myself to map out my clues ahead of time, writing down where they would end up and how Abigail would find them. At first, I created many more than were necessary for the plot, and so I removed the unneeded ones in order to make my story simpler.

Outside of narrative, the style and prose of the story also took a while to perfect. Writing the story in first person meant that I could more easily hide details from the audience as they would only know what Abigail did at any given moment (as an added bonus, this also meant that my reader can try and solve the mystery as Abigail does), however, it also required using a nested narrative, something I had never done before. When I first was introduced to the idea of the nested narrative, I wasn't sure how to structure it. So, I thought about some of the stories that I had read that used this method. The couple that came to mind were "The Princess Bride," by William Goldman, and Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein." I knew that I had to make my nested narrative simple, so I thought a lot about how to incorporate it. The reason why I started the narrative on a train leaving Seattle, was because I wanted to give a sense of progress in the story, having it both began and end with Abigail on a train. Having set the plot a few years after World War

I, I was able to use a retired soldier as the person who Abigail was telling the story to. The reason why I chose to do this was because I wanted a character who could relate to Abigail's suffering and who had experienced death and pain himself. Throughout the writing process, there were many changes and adjustments I had to make, many of which were not apparent until the editing process.

The revision and editing process of writing a novel is a long and difficult one. A large reason for this is that long plots work somewhat like a game of Jenga, where one must be careful not to have their story collapse by removing one scene from the beginning that will affect a scene at the end. There were multiple times where I found that adding or removing a certain scene would affect the overall story severely, and as such, I would have to go back through my draft and add in or remove details to make sure that everything remained constant and made sense to the reader.

The second reason why the editing process can be so difficult is the sheer amount of time it takes. I spent hours making sure that every line was the best it could be, and that every piece of punctuation was in the proper place. There were times when I felt like the editing process took longer than actually writing the book. Going through this process however, taught me a lot about both small rules of grammar that I had not spent much time considering before, along with how to make my writing better. One major part of this included writing in short lines which worked to better clarify what was happening in the story, and what Abigail was thinking at any given moment. By doing this, I was able to add more to her character along with better explaining her thought process and therefore, how she comes to solve the mystery to the reader. I hope to use the skills I learned in the process to continue improving upon my writing in the future.

Going forward, I hope to improve my writing by continuing to learn more about the world through both reading and real-life experiences. I believe that stories are most believable when the writer has personal experiences with the subjects they write about, and so hope to have a lot of experiences to make my

writing as believable as possible. As a reader, going forward, I hope to expand on my comfort zones and explore more difficult works in both fiction and non-fiction. My time at Linfield University has given me some of the skills I need to better understand works of literature, and by understanding what works in a certain story and why it works, I can apply similar rules to my own writing to make it the best it can be. In regards to non-fiction, I hope to study a variety of subjects, including history, science and world cultures in order to understand both how people really act, and how certain parts of the world work. I believe that by understanding more about the world, I will have more to draw inspiration from.

As a writer, I plan to continue working on short stories in order to increase my skills before trying to write a novel again. I hope to find a career in the creative writing field, and I want to continue to learn the craft of story writing so that I will be able to prove my ability in this fairly competitive field. I do not know where my skills as a writer will take me in the future, and I believe it is too soon to make a choice of where my writing career will put me in the end. I am interested in all aspects of writing including being a novelist, or a film scriptwriter, or even something else in the areas of videogames or television. However, I would like to have a career that allows me to explore many different subjects, as a large part of the reason why I chose the creative writing major was due to the fact that all subjects of study can improve one's writing.

Writing this thesis has been a long but highly rewarding process. I was able to learn how a mystery novel is crafted, and the fine details that go into making it engaging, along with how to structure character and plot together. By using the ideas given to me by both real life and prior authors, I was able to make my story the most interesting it could be, and through the editing process, I was able make the prose as good as possible. Going forward, I plan to use the skills I gained from this venture to continue improving upon my work.