



WOMAN  
JUSTICE

ROSALYN WRAIGHT

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Rosalyn Wraight

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# 1

A promiscuous quiet crept over the dim sleeping city as Jansen marched a sentinel's path. His eyes darted from corner to corner; his nervous steps click-clacked. His buffed and black shoes reflected the incandescent moon. A good Catholic girl would not walk here: shiny shoes were a devil's mirror to what hid beneath a pleated skirt. But Jansen walked; he paced.

"McCallister," he suddenly grumbled beneath his breath, as he eyeballed the red Subaru® that sliced through the darkness and verged the sedan-dotted curb. Jansen's heart quickened in apprehension; he gulped a deep breath. Before the engine even sputtered to submission, the door opened with a mighty *reeeeeck*.

"What we got, Jansen?" she asked, as she downed the last urgent swallow of 3:00 a.m. coffee. "Better be good. Dragging me out of bed."

Her feet moved faster than her words as she rounded the car. A cigarette dangled from her lips, billowing smoke into her face; she squinted one eye, her cheek defensively toad-like by the time she reached the sidewalk.

With a swift, yet fumbling effort, Jansen reached into his jacket to retrieve his notebook. Madly, he scoured his notes, praying they were thorough enough. He gulped another breath and readied his mouth to speak, but before his words rallied to formation...

"Well, Jansen? You gonna stand here all night? There's not much of it left," she pelted, inching her sleeve up, exposing her watch to emphasize. "So what we got?"

"Bones—bones, Detective. All over the place."

"Bones, Jansen? You don't say!" she retorted, her hand slapping the side of her face, feigning utter shock. "Now what precisely are we talking here, Jansen? Chicken bones? Fish bones? Dr. McCoy beamed off the *Enterprise*? Or perhaps something a bit more impressive to

justify waking me?”

Jansen’s face reddened, as she leaned into him to deliver her words. He watched her drop her cigarette, extinguishing it with a menacing and merciless twist of her foot. He envisioned the Benson & Hedges® sporting a tiny policeman’s cap, grimacing, panicking, shrieking at her descending shoe.

“Human bones, Detective. The M.E. got here a few minutes ago. Said they were definitely human bones.”

Wordlessly, McCallister moved away from him and started down a wooded path sanctioned by the Crime Scene Unit. Jansen followed. He noted her off-hour sweat pants and tennis shoes; a red T-shirt hung below her bomber jacket. Suddenly, he felt even more uneasy in her presence, his face reddening again: the hint of a pale green camise peeked out from under her shirt. *She wore silk?*

“Who found the bones?” she asked in a finger-snap tone, bulldozing branches and brush out of her way.

“That guy over there,” Jansen replied, pointing ahead to a clearing aglow with portable floodlights. In the distance, a shivering man braced himself against the November wind; he looked like the only motionless insect on an anthill.

“Man named Beaumont,” Jansen continued. “Age 29. Works the late shift at St. Vincent’s. He’s an orderly. Verified by his supervisor. Let’s see—” he paused, shining his flashlight to illuminate his notes, “a Janet Linsmeyer. She said he worked the 5–1 shift as usual,” Jansen resumed, reciting his notes with a tentative, yet boasting tone. “Beaumont said he was walking home after work and cut through here to save some time. Only lives a few blocks away, 442 Henchman Circle. Said he found the bones about 1:20 and then went home to call. The department received the call at 1:37. My partner, Jessop, and I met him at his residence, interviewed him briefly, and then brought him back here to locate the scene.”

Seemingly disinterested in Jansen’s dissertation, McCallister interrupted, “I would guess this area’s pretty dark without department lights. Wouldn’t you say, Jansen?” As she spoke, she made a point of scanning the undersides of the dense, leafless trees that formed a webbed ceiling.

His eyes mimed hers, expecting to find her line of reasoning looped over a tree branch like a fisherman’s miscalculation.

“Well, it was pretty dark when we got here,” he recalled aloud.

“Pitch black, in fact. Even with that full moon up there.”

“And this Beaumont fellow—did he give you any indication how he just *happened* to find human bones in pitch black woods?”

Her words reached Jansen as abruptly as she had stopped to deliver them. As if coming face to face with a cold brick wall, Jansen froze just inches from colliding with her.

“Question him again. *Now*,” she ordered, pausing long enough to make her point. “Oh, and Jansen...please see if the poor boy might need a manicure.”

“Yes, ma’am. I will get right on that,” he fumbled, dispatching his words to follow her as she continued down the path. He watched her move on, away from him, becoming smaller and smaller with distance.

Jansen’s entire body slumped in exasperation. He feared that, in a matter of only minutes, he had proved himself inept: his inexperience, the wetness behind his ears, glowing neon against the backdrop of a sleeping city. He watched McCallister until she moved beyond his sight; she would commence with the real investigation while he repeated a menial task. He inhaled deeply to resuscitate his dignity and went, again, to question the hospital worker.

Marching briskly into the clearing, Detective McCallister paused amid the police officers who were hurried by duty and procedure. She gazed in a luscious circle: a queen valuating her kingdom—a dog sniffing a fire hydrant. She swilled the adrenalin of challenge and ideal. All around, giant, yet painfully intricate, puzzle pieces whispered to her, beckoned her, pleaded. With obsessive delight, she would tend to them. With tenacity, she would assemble, until the image was clear, the scheme—grand. The only thing she would not do? Give in to the fiendish desire to contort her face, rub her hands coarsely together, and release the sinister guffaw from the small of her throat.

Her eyes veered to the center of the scene where the medical examiner squatted, bones strewn at his feet. Diligently, he sorted his collection, removed the dank earth and half-rotten leaves, and held each bone in the floodlight’s glow: turning them rotisserie-style, studying each angle, each nuance. McCallister thought he resembled an archaeologist in The City of Gold, rather than a doctor stationed among the dead.

Long before McCallister had ever clutched the rung of detective, Peter Hastings had been appointed Medical Examiner. He inspired

the respect of the force, the entire community, with his expertise and dedication. But McCallister was far from awed by his accolade. Their history spanned back to grade school like a spider's intricate web: delicate yet durable, a myriad of junctures and divergences, and so very difficult to cast aside.

Having once played Cowboys & Indians with the illustrious doctor, McCallister found herself unwilling to modernize her view of him. In her mind, he remained a sobbing boy: overpowered, tied to a crooked elm with her jump rope, held hostage with her cap-gun, until he groveled for his freedom, as the sun sank beneath their childhood days.

Although the sniveling boy evolved into a man, a doctor, and quickly, the county's medical examiner, McCallister maintained that success befriended him too easily. It stemmed from a diploma, an undisputed acceptance of who he was and what he did—while her success arrived with an abundance of sweat and blood. As cadet, rookie, officer, and finally—detective, she had much more than simple ability to demonstrate; she had to prove herself capable as a woman in a man's world, stretching beyond societal perception. Yet at this moment in time, McCallister and Hastings traveled different paths with synonymous destinations.

“So what do you think, Hastings?” she asked as she approached him. His eyes acknowledged her only briefly and then returned to the bone he held.

“I think you people ought to learn how to call each other something besides last names. This is like some bad movie from the 30s. I would think that late night rendezvous in the woods would put us on intimate terms, wouldn't you?” he proposed, and then added, in a ruling baritone, “What precisely would you like to know, *McCallister?*”

Expecting the long-arm of *her* law to throttle the M.E., every officer within earshot poised to hear her reply. She simply laughed—surprising them—surprising Hastings most of all.

She laughed at his remark because she knew he was right. Somehow, yellow police lines and a corpse made cops stiff and sanctimonious. Or maybe it was the rarity of the occasion. In a Midwestern city of 80,000, corpses weren't cloaked in mystery. They were the victims of accidents or suicides; bodies with names and identities; shells with clear, yet voiceless explanations. Murders and mysteries, in these

parts, were left to Friday night movies and bookstore shelves.

“All right, Peter. I get the drift,” she said, her impatience now pointing beyond small-talk. “So, what do you think?”

“Well, these are human remains all right. Definitely an adult. Seems to have been elaborately dismembered. Look at this femur,” he remarked, wielding half of a thigh bone in front of her. “Cut clean through, and the lack of a bending effect would suggest that the dismemberment was not perimortem. And not in a crude fashion... no, not with a hatchet or an axe. No, it’s not like that at all. The bisection is too clean. Whoever did this knew what he was doing. Took a lot of time. I mean look at this!” he said, spinning on the balls of his feet, his hands out in a solemn *ta-da* maneuver.

Behind the spot where Hastings squatted, there lay a furrow—maybe less than a foot deep, adjacent to a thick oak tree.

“The remains were left in this shallow grave here,” he continued. “Looks like something—probably an animal—maybe a dog—must have started to dig it up.”

McCallister equated the sight of the bones to fleas on a dog: at first, unseen, but in the simple recognition of one, vision instantaneously became wide-eyed and infested. As soon as she acknowledged the first bone, even the dim light could no longer hide them all—sticking out—here and there—through clumps of dirt and wet leaves.

“Any idea how long it’s been here?” McCallister asked.

“I’ll have to run some tests. There’s no tissue left on the bones, even with the cold weather, and I cannot detect any evidence of larvae. The bones appear corroded, blackened—which would indicate that the defleshing was chemical, rather than natural,” his answer came, but it seemed as if he said the words more for himself than for McCallister, a cognitive checking-off. “We’ll have to just wait and see. It would be premature of me to make any suppositions at this point. It’ll take some time before this area is even close to being fully explored.”

“How about male or female? Can you—at least—tell me that?” she asked, the Crime Scene Unit’s camera flashing behind her, turning bones into tasteless still-lives.

“I’d rather wait to answer that until I get these all in some kind of order so I can make more precise measurements. We found the skull—it might indicate a female gender, but I’m certainly not prepared to state that as fact. It’s in pretty rough shape. Appears to have been smashed repeatedly, but not with the precision of how it

was dismembered. I would suspect this will prove to be cause of death. But I can't be certain yet. Whatever happened was pretty gruesome. I'll be honest with you, Laura; it's going to take some time for me to get a handle on exactly what—or who—we're dealing with."

"Ah, come on, Hastings! What do I need to do to get a straight answer from you? Tie you to a tree?" she sniped. "You've got to be able to give me something solid to start with. Hey, what's that?"

As the camera flashed again, McCallister noticed a glint in the burrow behind Hastings. Quickly, she pointed to it and crouched down for a closer look. Hastings spun around to join her, a huddle of inquisition.

"It's metallic—a ring..." Hastings noted as he dug around it, tapped it with one of his instruments. "Personal effects? In this menagerie? Laura, yell for one of your boys to come and collect this."

McCallister, far too intrigued to chastise him for his sexist assumption, made a point, nonetheless, of summoning a woman from the Crime Scene Unit.

With a methodical swish-swish of blue overalls, a worker promptly approached. She carried a translucent evidence container, housing five or six cigarette butts, the word Newport® still legible. She held it out in front of the detective, obviously inviting some hoopla for her tagged and numbered specimen.

"You really should quit, Ristow," McCallister said with a garish grin and a roll of her eyes. Without further comment, she turned toward the medical examiner. "Now, Hastings. How about it, Hastings? I need something solid to go on. Just what am I supposed to do while you get your jollies in that lab of yours? Twiddle my thumbs?"

"I don't know, McCallister. Maybe you could learn some first names."

"Give me a break, *Peter*."

# 2

“Here’s your coffee, dear. Just the way you like it,” the silver-haired woman said, placing a plum-colored cup and matching carafe amid the clutter. The table depicted a housekeeper’s worst nightmare: where there should have been the sheen of a good polish...books, papers, pencils, cigarettes, ashes, ashtrays, ribbons, and a typewriter abounded. She shifted things around until her place setting looked respectable.

“Can I get you anything else before I leave?” she asked. “Something to eat? Pie maybe?”

Failing to notice her housekeeper, the coffee, the familiar words, Emily stared a hole through the wall; despondency loomed back at her with a fiendish eye.

“Emily!” the woman said, toppling Emily’s vapid stance.

“No—no, Olivia. This is fine. Thank you,” she answered distractedly.

“Well then, how about I just tidy up a bit here while you start on that coffee of yours,” she pressed, trying to keep her involved, but Emily resumed her inattentiveness and offered no reply.

With calculated clumsiness, Olivia rolled a few pencils off the table, a giant lumberjack letting miniature logs break free. Surely, *that* would evoke some sort of emotion. What perfectionistic writer would allow anyone to touch the precious instruments of her work? But Emily still did not move.

“Aw, come on, Emily. I hate seeing you like this. You get a little farther away from the world everyday,” she said, almost pleading with her to react, to do something, anything—even if it was to reprimand her deliberate aggravation. “Here, let me rub your shoulders for a bit. You don’t get enough exercise, you know. Sometimes I wonder if this oak chair hasn’t become a permanent part of you.”

Olivia inched closer, extending her hands to shoulders knotted

with tension. Like a weakened prizefighter between rounds, Emily moved into her touch, raising her head slightly, pulling her blond hair aside, complying.

“That’s it, hon. Just relax. Drink your coffee and relax,” Olivia encouraged. “Maybe today will be different. Oh, how I hope that is so. Maybe today it will happen like it always has.”

“And maybe not,” Emily spat, abruptly retreating from the touch, forcibly pushing the typewriter across the table like a frustrated child. “It’s been six months now. Six whole months! I just can’t write. I can’t. It’s over. Somehow, I’ve got to accept that it’s over with,” she purged, slamming her fist onto the table, refusing to succumb to rising tears.

Taken aback by the reaction that she, herself, had provoked, Olivia cautiously responded, “It’s *not* over. Don’t talk nonsense. Maybe today will be different. I’ll get out of your way here. Just keep trying, dear. Keep trying.”

Hesitantly, Olivia pulled away and turned to leave. Emily listened to her footsteps through the house. She listened to the opening and the shutting of the front door. The horrid sound made every nerve wince: the sound of a tomb being sealed, confining her in a morbid silence, caging her, alone with herself.

Stiffening her back to the wooden chair, she clutched the cup of coffee, the daily prelude to her writing time. She inhaled its aroma, swirled the bitter goodness in her mouth. There had always seemed something magical about one o’clock coffee. Olivia purchased the beans at the gourmet shop every Tuesday after marketing. And each afternoon, she would grind them, bringing Emily the black magic, a brew notorious for summoning the Muse within her, making the words pour forth onto paper.

But today—today again, the coffee tasted only of bitter sadness. It embodied no magic, no Muse, no promise.

As she swallowed, her mind strayed from her makeshift office in the dining room, away from what she could not accomplish. Like a lost soul, her focus slipped through the French doors on the opposite side of the table...

The black-bellied clouds surrendered the rain they had long hoarded, every drop greedily claimed by the parched July earth. The Midwestern land had been dying: a slow, agonizing death, turning farmers and mosquitoes into vigilant mourners, turning the sounds of

summer into a dirge. But now, a shimmering mist trod the breeze like scores of diamonds returning wealth to the earth. Would the miser sky redeem itself in time? Was salvation the silver lining?

The crystal doors, through which Emily watched the rain, always made her feel like a sentinel, a gatekeeper to the secrets of life; the faithful things, things that could not hurt, things that few noticed—but she thrived upon.

The doors framed a small patch of forest, completely hidden from the bustling city around it. No one, but Emily, applauded the pheasant's daily rendition of an old woman scolding a child dashing through her flowerbed. No one else neighbored tenant rabbits, squatter squirrels, landlord crows—kept time with the soprano crickets, acappella treefrogs, portly toads with a bent for the Blues. No one wished upon the fireflies, speckling the night like momentary stars—or envied the slurping sounds of the earth, as it swilled life back into it.

Beyond the private view the doors gave her, Emily respected the very panes themselves. She delighted in polishing them everyday, rain or shine, ritual, routine. Like the English having tea. Like children fleeing the schoolyard. With a ripped, shapeless T-shirt and a pail of ammonia water, she rubbed them clean—as if in payment for the things the doors provided her in her solitary life.

Until six months ago, Emily had had no wishes. Everything she needed was framed by the dining room doors. As long as her view remained steadfast, she felt safe. She didn't have to see cars pass on the street in front of her house—contend with God's fleet of overzealous salesmen at the front door, offering to save her soul—acknowledge people out for walks, strolling, hand in hand, advertising the overrated ties that bind.

Despite her self-imposed quarantine, Emily knew the talk of the neighborhood, the outpouring from the rumor-mill about the eccentric writer who rarely left her house. Over the years, she watched curiosity turn to fear. The woman next door, making a frenzied dash into the yard to recapture her barking dog. The gardener, hastily cutting the lawn in order to flee her inspecting, suspicious eye. Children, cautiously, yet eagerly, struggling to steal a glimpse as she retrieved the morning mail. At times, she was defiantly tempted to greet them, donning some frightful Halloween mask. Just to satisfy them. Just to teach them. How frustrating it was when monsters did not look like

monsters, she often thought. The entire world in front of her house was an intrusion. Unwanted. Unneeded. Uninvited.

Few people were welcomed into Emily's world, and even then, relationships were functional, rather than emotional. Each ensured her isolation from life, rather than bridged it. The agent. The housekeeper. The mailman. The accountant. Each, a title, a task. Each accorded her things, but in her mind, they were replaceable. They could not hurt her. They could not leave with more than she chose to give to them. They could not reside within her heart. There was fondness for them. But love? No, love was something that hurt. Love was one of those monsters that didn't look like a monster.

Writers were allowed to be reclusive, aberrant, mysterious. She took proud delight in fostering the world's stereotype, affording her the sanctuary of home. Maybe the image fit her in a lot of ways, but moreso, she wore it as a badge that set her apart. As if by sleight of hand, her unpretentious brick house transformed into a forbidding fortress...surrounded by a moat filled with crocodiles...shrouded by a roof where Poe's raven perched, ready to impale any intruder.

The stereotype justified keeping odd hours, getting lost in the simplest of thoughts. It made her contend a biological relation to Juan Valdez and the Marlboro® man. In a whirl of caffeine and cigarette smoke, the typewriter keys moved in unison with Chopin's moodiness and Beethoven's nerve.

Emily shaped nights into daylight by hammering at the keyboard, and when the lack of inspiration made her bitter, she would do nothing but stare through her French doors and wait. Sometimes she would sit and wait for days, existing only where her line of sight took her. Waiting, as if in suspended animation. Waiting, as if inspiration itself would emerge from the wooded lot to greet her, to bring the seeds of her work—seeds that germinated into material, typeset in a manner that fulfilled a writer, in a style that brought fans racing to bookstores for her latest creation.

At a tender age, the ambition to be a writer had infested her soul. She was the only child ever known, in her small hometown, to have kidnapped Shakespeare from the local library. She had tried so fervently to convince the librarian to let her keep the book, but at the expense of poetic justice, Emily realized that *all* shrews could not be tamed. She was assessed a fine for her deed and ordered to release the immortal writer—unharmmed.

Maybe that was when her passions and eccentricities became apparent to others, as well as to herself. Maybe that was when her nonconformity became glaring, forcing her to seek accepting shadows. “You couldn’t *pay* me to even touch a book of Shakespeare,” the joke began, leaving Emily as the punchline.

To her, the words she found on musty, yellowed pages were as prophets to the things she wanted for herself. A command of the language. The immortality of ink on paper. She consumed the words with fervent obsession. She had lost herself—and found herself—in the words, the works of the masters. Yeats. Tennyson. Sisters, Bronte. Hemingway. Whitman. Michelangelo. Twain. Dickinson. Steinbeck. They confirmed that she, too, had verbs and nouns and adjectives attached to the very cells of her being. Not DNA. Not chromosomes. Language surged through her veins. Metaphors and similes were her heartbeat. Allusions, the pulse.

She always believed that something forced her hand to move, to scrawl words on paper—something quenchless inside—something driven, despite the many years of frustration and despair it had brought. She even went so far as to believe she was destined to be a writer because of her given name, Emily Elizabeth. Many times, she wondered: who in their right mind would name an innocent child Emily Elizabeth, if not as a namesake to the great master, Dickinson, herself. In this century, the name sounded more like a Lily Tomlin character, than a girl—a woman—who could command her future and gain respect.

Throughout her life, she tried to get her mother to admit the namesake, the fateful meaning she *must have* insinuated. “Your great-grandmother’s name was Emily and your grandmother’s was Elizabeth. Nothing more. I gave you your name to make your place in the family.”

The family! Emily loathed her place in the family. The family! What was this sacred honor? What was this hallowed place she was expected to be so eager to assume? Generations of men had run the family business. That was all it was. No infamous legacy to uphold. Just a business. The loathsome expectation to continue the line was put on her at an early age: to learn the business from her father, to take it over when her father was ready to retire. The age-old arguments had nearly come to blows over Emily’s refusal to be the obedient, only child. “For Christ’s sake, we’re talking about a butcher

shop, not the royal throne!”

“It put a roof over your head. It put you through school,” her mother’s moralizing always began. “Maybe you think it’s not much, but your great-grandfather built it with his bare hands. And his family and his son’s son and now you, Emily. Now you. And once you marry, you will have a son to carry on.”

The family! Bah! She would be a great writer—not just another commoner to carry on the name and the iron-fisted traditions of family. She was different from them. But not in the *belligerent, ungrateful, disrespectful* way they were so quick to assume. She had language surging through her veins—not some desire to make headcheese!

The butcher shop cornered Main & 16th Street for nearly a hundred years. Built there by family. Tended by family. Perpetuated by each generation without question, without flaw. And now, it was Emily’s turn. She wasn’t the first only child, but she was the first ‘only daughter.’ Already a glitch in tradition. Oh, but then Emily further entangled the lineage, proclaiming the word *lesbian* as an adjective to describe herself. There would be no sons. No traditions. No congruence with the grand scheme her ancestry had etched into cold, cold stone.

“If I’m going to break family tradition, I might as well demolish it!” she had tearfully screamed the last time she saw them those many years ago, leaving them behind, moving on with her life. Her soul was tired of trying to gain an acceptance they refused to give.

No, this Emily—she would not propitiate them by assuming a role as the makeshift male in a butcher shop. She cared nothing for worn, wooden floors that were the foundation of family ways. She cared nothing for worn, wooden floors, stained with animal blood. Like the world on the front side of the house, those wooden floors were simply another intrusion. Unwanted. Unneeded. Uninvited.

Emily continued to watch the growing puddles of July rain, keeping her back stiff to the chair. Melodiously, each drop of rain rejuvenated something in the world, relieved something thirsty, abated the slow death of drought. Each was but a promise that life would proceed, not pause, not end. Despite its hopeful sound, Emily heard only anger, an intense jealousy, for she knew that those droplets could cease only the drought of soil, not of soul.

The reservoir of words within Emily had dried up six months

ago. Without words and their place on paper, the meaning in her life was gone. She teetered on the edge of herself, a gnawing inside with no panacea. Deadlines had been long passed. Her agent slowed her urgings to a near-silence that made Emily's failure deafening. Even the mailman hid his face, seemingly guilty, as if empty hands were his own making. The language that had always raced through her veins to sustain her, waned, until finally—hopelessly—it had stopped.

Emily sensed, then, that breath was not what was important in staking a claim to life. Breath meant nothing. It became, simply, a useless, mechanical motion, a somber beacon if the very life had been gutted from her. Her tortured soul resigned in silence, next to a typewriter webbed in idleness.

For months, she had tried and failed to bring forth the words of substance and sustenance. Under six moons, she sat at the dining room table, refusing to give up the discipline of the craft, but found no words, no compulsion, no meaning. Just a profound inertia, a sense that the blood had been drained from her, leaving her limp and listless.

She had published thirteen mysteries, collections of poetry here and there. Far more than any sense of accomplishment, brimmed a fear of being impinged by an apex: her career amounted to these things and nothing more. To Emily, what had been written lost importance in quest of the next paragraph, the next page, the next book. Each triumph she perceived as a bridge, not a landing. But the bridges felt to be burning and July rain could not extinguish them.

Emily rose from her chair as if movement was formidable. Riddled with self-doubt and bitterness, she wandered the house, finding solace in nothing. The living room couch and the antique rocker were mere pieces of furniture set down only for show; tokens, facades that seated no one anymore. Her fingers snaked the dusty spines of shelved books. The masters', her own—each but a merciless memento. She flipped open the music box, given by a lover when there was time and trust in her world, its tune faint and fractured. Her world inside contained things; things could not fill her. The world outside contained strangers; no one could fulfill her.

With the simple turning around, the physical shift between one frame of her life and the next, a tempest...

A woman stood in the French doors of the dining room. She ventured forth, her movements graceful, soft, the breath of a summer

breeze. The incredible air about her suckled the image: nearly floating, hovering, scarcely touching the subservient ground at her feet.

As soon as Emily's eyes touched her, they were fixed; moving only when the woman moved, following her, tracing her. No—it was even more than that. The woman had become the very sockets of Emily's eyes: seizing them, owning them, making them powerless to seek anything but the sight of her. And the sight of her was nearly hypnotic—like a hazy dream—a fragment of something so real, so vivid that it seemed the contrary. Emily's eyes were adrift with her, lost, possessed.

“My dear woman,” she breathed, now just inches from Emily's face, “why is your heart so heavy? It flattens the world around you.”

“What?” Emily blurted, struggling to unshackle herself from the force abducting her. “What did you say? Who—who are you? Where did you come from?”

The woman didn't answer. There was only a pause, filled by the bellowing silence of their eyes meeting. Oh, her eyes were so blue—periwinkle—a sky, right before the dripping sun is swallowed by the night—a sea, that thinks the white shore its mistress. *Something like that*—she thought to herself—*something profound*.

“Why is your heart so heavy?” the woman soon reiterated.

“My heart is not heavy,” Emily answered in polite reflex, smiling at the sudden and surprising honesty of it, realizing that the deadness inside was gone. “No, there is no heaviness. Now, please tell me who you are.”

“I am Milicent. Milicent Baylor. Do you remember now?”

“Remember what? You? Oh, trust me, there would not be a way to forget you,” Emily responded, feeling reduced to an awkward schoolgirl, drowning in the bluest eyes she had ever seen.

“Good, then you do remember. I was afraid that you wouldn't.”

“Wait a minute,” she said. “I didn't say I remembered you. I said if we *had* met, I would be certain to remember you. But we've never met. Who are you?”

“Milicent Baylor. I already told you,” her tone hinging on indignation.

“And we've met before? Is that what you're saying? I'm sorry, I don't—I don't remember,” Emily spoke in an incompatible mixture of apology and self-pity.

“I don’t know why that surprises me. I guess I should have expected it from you,” she said, turning her eyes away, retreating. “I’m sorry I came. I’m sorry it still mattered.”

“Wait! You can’t go just like that. You can’t just walk into my house like this and leave without some plausible explanation! Please, just tell me,” Emily pleaded, desperate to keep even just the sight of her, desperate—as if her very survival depended upon it. “Tell me where we met.”

“Check your notes, Big Shot Writer.”

“Notes? What notes? What do you mean?”

But the woman didn’t answer. As gracefully as she had entered, she was leaving. Emily’s mind ricocheted between trying to stop her and simply watching her move: a hungry mind, starving eyes.

“*What notes?*” the words reached to her but fell short. “*What notes?*”

She was gone.

## About the Author

Rosalyn Wraight is the author of two other titles in the Detective Laura McCallister mystery series: *Secrets and Sins* and *Corpse Call*.

She is the author of the Lesbian Adventure Club series, which currently consists of ten titles: *Scavengers*, *Ledge Walkers*, *Savages*, *Loose Sleuths*, *Sisters*, *Leakers Ignited*, *Scraps*, *L-Word C-Word*, *Spiders*, and *Likely Suspects*. This ongoing series features Detective Laura McCallister, as well as various characters appearing in this title.

## On the Web

Author Website: [LesbianWriter.com](http://LesbianWriter.com)  
Author Bookstore: [LesbianAdventureClub.com](http://LesbianAdventureClub.com)

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