

Prologue

I will give you the treasures of the darkness and hidden riches of secret places . . .
Isaiah 45:3

June 14, 1894

I see the moon, and I imagine the moon sees me—every hidden part. The blood red of a ruby is reflected upon its surface. It appears like a floating jewel, fit for a queen.

The queen of death.

I wrap my arms around myself and shudder as my eyes focus on the skirt of cloudy film cushioning the lunar sphere, as if protecting it from the darkness, but . . .

Who will protect me?

I breathe in the heaviness of a coming storm. The air is electric around me. Gooseflesh spots my arms, and my hair stands at attention. My throat constricts. I claw at my neck, and I momentarily struggle for breath as I realize what I've done.

I didn't mean to kill him.

An eerie sensation prickles my skin through water logged clothes and causes me to shiver. My blouse and skirt stick to my body like weed seeds, and I long to be rid of them.

If only there is a way to rid me of the heartache of this night? It is a living nightmare from which there is no escape. The moon acts as my judge and accuses me from its heavenly throne.

I gaze once more at the ruby moon hung on a blackening curtain before I step under the covering of grapevines arching the stone walkway to home. It is late, and I am tired, but . . .

How will I even be able sleep after all that has transpired?

The reality is—I don't deserve sleep. The finality of this night grips my heart, and my stomach lurches with nausea. I hold my long, wet hair away from my mouth as I heave into the bushes.

When I recover, I move with exhaustion. Each step is an effort as I lift my heavy wood-like legs. I gaze straight ahead and study the thick lintel beams framing the doorway of my home. I hardly recognize this world I left hours before, but the glow of the lamplight through the leaded glass of the door beckons me inside. It waits like a sentinel to guide lost souls.

Perhaps that is what I am now? Lost. . .

My moccasined feet make no sound as I step carefully upon the last few steps. My hand finds the cool, curvy brass of the door handle. I hesitate and stop. If I proceed, I will be crossing over more than a physical threshold. I will cross through the past and make this night a part of the future.

I choke back a sob and hold my breath. The evening shadows blur as waves of dizziness spin before my eyes and ring in my ears. The conscious sound of a sudden intake of air shakes me.

How long have I been standing here, gripping the handle and dripping lake water on the step, my knuckles white with the force of the grasp? The drumming of my heart is ragged in my

ears. It is consuming and hammers out a steady gaveled beat.

I quietly open the heavy oak door and unfurl my fingers from its metal handle. My hands are cold, so cold, yet they burn at the same time. I look at my thin, tapered fingers, and for the first time, I notice how they shake. Despite the tremors, I inspect my hands and take in every path and crevice on their surface the faint light reveals. One stubborn spot of red remains on my index finger. I should rub it off, but I leave it.

Who am I? Whose hands are these really that have taken part in such a terrible thing? If only the pattern of my hands could tell me that.

Decisively, I inhale and step from the darkness into the light. I walk through the doorway, and ease the door shut behind me.