***Chapter One:***

Emily stared out the train window. She did not see the quaint farmhouses and snow-covered fields passing by. Normally, she would have enjoyed the beauty of the cold, December morning. Not now. Her hands lay tightly clenched in her lap against her expensive skirt. A passerby might have thought she looked very poised and confident with her smart cap and suit. How could they know how her entire world had suddenly been tipped upside down just five days ago? How she felt as though a tornado was wreaking havoc inside her body and crazy thoughts and emotions seemed to have taken over.

Last Tuesday, she had been preparing yet another charity dinner in the comfort of her lavish, Chicago mansion. Her life had consisted of a familiar, safe routine of charity events, theaters, and social gatherings. She had had a quiet, happy marriage (or so she had convinced herself), and an extravagant household with many servants.

That was until police had knocked on her door at about noon.  The butler showed them in. “Mrs. Cheshire?”

“Yes, I am she,” she had answered, quite oblivious to the fact that these policemen were not simply making their annual Christmas donation rounds. “Ma’am, I am sorry but I’m afraid I have some bad news for you. You may want to sit down.”

The young cop had awkwardly motioned to a plush chair nearest the elegant lady. Emily slowly sank down on the cushion and gazed expectantly at the boy.

“Mrs. Cheshire, I regret to have to inform you of this, but your husband is dead.”

Emily gasped and felt she would choke as she grabbed her throat. The police rambled on about the circumstances, but she barely heard pieces of his stuttered speech. “Shot in the head…at his office…discovered by his secretary when he didn’t respond to his intercom…Mrs. Cheshire?…Mrs. Cheshire?…Ma’am, we will need you to identify the body of course. Will you please accompany me to the morgue?” The young man looked concerned and her housemaid put an arm around her shoulders. “I…I will just be a minute while I fetch my things….” she managed.

It was the most difficult thing she had ever done when she forced herself to look as the police removed the cloth over her husband’s face. It had been a real blow for her, and she had readily accepted the policeman’s offer to question her later. The following hours were a blur during which her maid, Martha, scurried around waiting on her hand and foot and fretting over every murmur and groan she uttered. Later that afternoon, she managed to pull herself together enough to say, “Martha, I would like you to fetch the police. It was kind of them to wait to question me while I took a little bit to process, but there is no use keeping them waiting. I will have plenty of time to feel sorry for myself in the coming days and weeks.” *And months…years?* She thought to herself. She did not want to even think about that right now. She just wanted to climb in her bed, pull the covers over her head, and never get up again.

“Mrs. Cheshire, dear, are you quite sure?” the elderly maid looked concerned. Emily could see that she had been crying, even though the tough woman would never let her see and had evidently wiped her tears before turning to her. She sighed deeply and said, “Let’s just get this over with.”

­­­­­­­­­­­­­\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Emily looked up quickly when two police entered her foyer. They wiped their muddy shoes politely and the butler, Edward, took their snow-sprinkled overcoats and hats. The younger one, who introduced himself as Kenny Dolt, was back, along with an older, more experienced-looking man. The latter held out a hand to her. “Detective Isaac Cosgrove, ma’am. Please accept my sincere condolences.” Emily took his firm handshake and managed to halt her trembling for a moment to remember her manners. “I appreciate you coming back. I needed a few hours to process….It was…quite a shock for me, you must understand.”

“Not at all, ma’am. Now, I’m afraid we are going to have to go over some things if you are up to it?” His words were sympathetic, but his manner was stiff and business-like, Emily noticed. She knew she was only one of many cases he must be working, and she certainly didn’t want to waste his time.

Kenny had a pad and paper out, apparently ready to take notes, as she met Mr. Cosgrove’s sharp gaze. “Now, Mrs. Cheshire, I am going to cut to the chase…your husband appears to have committed suicide.” Emily inhaled sharply. *No, that can’t be right!* She wanted to shout. But she bit her tongue and waited for him to continue. “There were no fingerprints on the gun other than your husband’s. The secretary did not admit anyone to his office this morning. What we cannot understand is why? Can you provide us with some insight into this? Was your husband upset about something?”

“Um…no…I…can’t recall anything….No, no. Not at all, sir.” Emily’s mind cleared as she shook her head firmly. “Mr. Cosgrove, are you certain it was…um…” she bit her lip. “That Robert committed…” her voice faltered.

Kenny answered this time. “Mrs. Cheshire, ma’am, I know this is a lot to take in. Yes, all the evidence points to that. Are you sure there isn’t something you remember?” When Emily shook her head, Mr. Cosgrove asked impatiently, “How was your relationship with your husband? Were you having any marital issues? How about friends and acquaintances? Any arguments? Was your husband running into any financial trouble? Has he had any major disappointments or have you noticed changes recently in his behavior? I know these are personal questions, but we do need to go over these questions, you understand?”

Emily nodded and thought carefully before responding. “No, there was nothing different…nothing at all. This comes quite out of the blue to me. Everything seemed to be going so well for us. We just live a quiet life here. He doesn’t…*didn’t* discuss business matters at home, but he certainly didn’t seem agitated or disturbed. In fact, everything seemed normal right up to when…this morning…when Kenny came…” She sat back in her chair and brushed away a tear. No, she must be strong and see that she did her part in uncovering what led to this dreadful event. She knew in her heart he hadn’t committed suicide. Why did they seem so convinced?

At that moment, Martha entered with a tray of tea and biscuits. The two men hungrily accepted. Emily took the moment to compose herself. She would uncover the truth. She *would* see this through. For her husband’s sake, she *must*.

“Mr. Cosgrove, Kenny, I am certain my husband would never do this. Isn’t there even a possibility he was…murdered? Can’t you investigate further? Surely something has been missed. I know my husband. He would never take his own life. This is just all…wrong…” she looked helplessly from one to the other. They looked at her patiently, patronizingly, she noticed. Perhaps they felt sorry for her…this poor woman who couldn’t accept the cold, hard facts. But they didn’t know Robert like she did. Robert was murdered; she knew it as sure as she knew anything right at that moment.

Mr. Cosgrove broke in. “Ma’am, I’m afraid there’s not much we can do. The facts are the facts. It’s a clean, cut-and-dry case. We would like to understand why, but…if you are sure you don’t remember anything, well, that’s all we have left to wrap this up. If you recall anything, will you let us know? We’ve got to get going now, lots of trouble with the snow on the streets. And Christmas time and all, we have had a string of thefts. We are also assisting the FBI with Dillinger and Capone. Frankly, our resources are stretched mighty thin. Too thin to go chasing some goose that doesn’t exist. I am sorry, ma’am. We’ll…just be going then. Good day, Mrs. Cheshire.” The man nodded curtly to her as Edward brought their hats and coats. Then they took their leave.

Emily stared after them into the snow falling on the quiet street. She shivered, but not just from the December chill. Her head was spinning. How could this happen? Why were they so quick to dismiss her husband’s murder as a suicide? And that was when she knew it. Deep down beyond a shadow of a doubt, she *knew* her husband had been murdered. And now she knew one more thing. It was up to her alone to find justice.

***Chapter Two:***

Emily looked down at her gloved hands and willed them to stop twisting in her lap. The train was almost to Detroit now. After her husband’s funeral, she had made arrangements to visit her husband’s only living relative—a rich aunt who lived in Detroit. Maybe she would throw some light on her husband’s life before their marriage. Emily did not where else to start. There was nothing in their five years of marriage that would indicate anything about the murder/suicide, to her mind at least. She had made up her mind to find out the truth for herself….since no one else apparently had any question in their mind as to the circumstances surrounding Robert’s untimely death.

She alighted from the train and quickly found a taxi who would take her to Aunt Josephine’s. The well-to-do old woman had never married and still lived in the family mansion in one of Detroit’s most affluent neighborhoods. Her brother and his wife had died when Robert was a child, and she had taken him and raised him. Emily had never met the woman, and Robert was very quiet about his past. It had often bothered her, but she had never thought Robert had any sinister motives for his secrecy.

She reminisced about the time she had met her husband. She was introduced to Robert at a charity ball six-and-a-half years earlier. He was a prestigious lawyer and she a rich heiress who spent her days volunteering to raise funds for Chicago’s less fortunate. They had had a happy marriage, although as Emily reflected honestly on their years together, she discovered a cold truth that she had become accustomed to suppressing almost subconsciously. Robert was very private…about his past, about his work, and about his innermost feelings. They had an outwardly perfect life, but Emily had often felt lonely. She could never be as close to Robert as she would have liked.

Now, all that secrecy had a sinister tone to it. What was he so private about? Was there some awful secret she was about to discover? Emily felt a cold chill run up her spine at that thought. *Silly me*. Well, whatever was in store for her at Aunt Josephine’s, she would face it head on. She squared her shoulders and took a peak at the elegant mansion as the taxi pulled up the long driveway.

­­­­­\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

“Miss Josephine has taken ill, I’m afraid.” The butler informed her at the door. He was very young for a butler, she noted. “Come on in, Miss, and make yourself comfortable. We were so sorry to hear about Mr. Cheshire’s death. You must have had quite a shock, Please, wait here while I fetch your things. Alice will be down shortly.” He indicated a mahogany settee in the parlor and disappeared out the front door.

Emily sighed and sat down on the settee. She felt an odd nervousness, but also a strange excitement. She might soon know what this was all about. She would finally know her husband’s history. It somehow made her feel close to him, being here in his childhood home. A tear slipped down her cheek.

She quickly wiped it away and forced herself to look around the room. It was beautiful. Elegant tapestries and what she assumed were portraits of deceased family members decorated the walls. There were several ornate side tables, and silk curtains adorned the floor-to-ceiling windows which lined one end of the room. The doors to the entry and the rest of the house were closed, but she could hear footsteps coming down stairs evidently just outside one door. Then it swung open and a rather portly, middle-aged woman came bustling in. Her bonnet and apron were slightly askew and she tugged them into place as she turned to face Emily.

“Emily, dear. I’m Alice. It is such a pleasure to meet you, dear. You poor thing. Did you have a good journey? You must be famished. Let me go fetch you something. Tea? Coffee? We have a lovely spread of gingerbread and lemon bars fresh out of the oven. Maryann is a fabulous cook. Here, let me just take your things.” She chattered on as she removed Emily’s coat and took her scarf, gloves, and hat. “Well, now, I will be right back, dearie, with some nourishment. You just sit there and relax a spell.” And she was gone back the way she came.

Emily got up and paced the floor. She could not relax, tired though she was. She wandered over to look at one of the family portraits. There was a gentleman who probably came over on the Mayflower in one. Very strict looking, she mused. A sweet-looking young girl wearing a white lace overlay over her pink frock gazed out a window in one. In another picture, a pair of twin boys stood rigidly outside the front of the house. Must have been two generations back, she thought. She saw a picture of her husband and caught her breath. Regardless of the mystery shrouding his recent death, she was still in love with him and felt his loss acutely. She backed up and turned around. Another portrait caught her eye on the opposite wall. A beautiful woman with bright red hair piled on top of her head descended a royal staircase dressed in an ornate pink tapestry gown. She had a faraway look in her eyes. Emily really would have to have Aunt Josephine give her the family history. All these interesting people. She wondered what their stories were.

Suddenly, she heard a commotion outside the closed door leading to the staircase. Excited voices and hurried footsteps sounded, then Alice burst through the door and, without even acknowledging Emily, ran out the other door towards the front of the house, calling the butler’s name, “Aaron! Aaron! Come quick! Fetch the Doctor! Josephine’s taken a turn for the worse!”
Emily jumped up at once and ran through the door leading up the stairs. No, she would not miss what might be her last opportunity to speak with Robert’s only living relative about his past! Aunt Josephine simply *couldn’t* die without talking to Emily. She assumed the old woman was upstairs, as Alice kept going up and down, and darted up the staircase. She glanced up and down the long hallway extending in both directions. All the doors were closed, but she thought she heard a moan from the farthest door on the left. She slowed her pace and smoothed her hair and skirt before hesitantly knocking on the heavy wooden door. When there was no response, she slowly pushed open the door and entered the room.