

Chapter One



I know he is close. There is a green feather near my black heel that has fallen from his mask. He is standing behind me, waiting. I will turn around and face him, fully aware that no one else can see him tonight but me. His warm breath is on my neck but it is not enough to thaw the coldness that has taken over my body. He has something to tell me. Finally, I will see what I have been waiting for, what his victims have witnessed. That's where I will begin the story: two months before, when I investigated his first murder.

I stood at the end of a full-sized mahogany bed, removing a crimson stained sheet to reveal her dismembered remains. This was how my year began and how hers ended. Claire Watkins. The fifteen-year-old piano prodigy, Garden District socialite, and beloved daughter of Colin and Anna Watkins. Looking at the bloodied comforter that would now comfort no one, I realized that I would never hear her perform again.

It was February of 1978 when my partner, Detective Roy Agnew, and I investigated this young girl's murder. An unseasonably cold winter combined with an unusual homicide: a debutante divided into five pieces.