

*The*  
WHITE  
FEATHER  
MURDERS



RACHEL McMILLAN



HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS  
EUGENE, OREGON

Scripture quotations are taken from

The Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

The King James Version of the Bible.

Cover by Nicole Dougherty

Cover Image © Kristina Smirnova / iStock

Published in association with the William K. Jensen Literary Agency, 119 Bampton Court, Eugene, Oregon 97404.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

## THE WHITE FEATHER MURDERS

Copyright © 2017 by Rachel McMillan

Published by Harvest House Publishers

Eugene, Oregon 97402

[www.harvesthousepublishers.com](http://www.harvesthousepublishers.com)

ISBN 978-0-7369-6644-3 (pbk.)

ISBN 978-0-7369-6645-0 (eBook)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: McMillan, Rachel – author.

Title: The white feather murders / Rachel McMillan.

Description: Eugene, Oregon : Harvest House Publishers, [2017] | Series:

Herringford and Watts mysteries ; 3

Identifiers: LCCN 2016046260 (print) | LCCN 2016054678 (ebook) | ISBN 9780736966443 (paperback : alk. paper) | ISBN 9780736966450 (e-book)

Subjects: LCSH: Women detectives—Canada—Fiction. |

Murder—Investigation—Fiction. | BISAC: FICTION / Christian / Suspense. |

GSAFD: Mystery fiction.

Classification: LCC PR9199.4.M4555 W48 2017 (print) | LCC PR9199.4.M4555 (ebook) | DDC 813/.6—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2016046260>

**All rights reserved.** No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, digital, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

**Printed in the United States of America**

17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 / BP-CD / 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



FOR  
JANTE SYLVIA

*Who loved this magically wonderful city as much as I do.*



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



My thanks go to...

Gerry and Kathleen McMillan, for the constant support.

The Harvest House team. I so enjoy working with you.

My lovely Maisie. Tante Rachel loves you.

Allison Pittman and Sonja Spaetzel. I am so blessed to have friends like you. Thanks for talking me off many a ledge with this manuscript.

Kathleen Kerr, for many a golden moment.

William Bell, who once included me in the acknowledgments section of one of his books, and who I wish were here to experience my returning the favor.

Thanks also to Jared and Sarah McMillan, Leah and Ken Polonenko, Ruth Samsel, Maureen Jennings, Melanie Fishbane, Tim Jolly, and Lin-Manuel Miranda.



*There's an east wind coming all the same, such a wind as never blew on England yet. It will be cold and bitter, Watson, and a good many of us may wither before its blast. But it's God's own wind none the less, and a cleaner, better stronger land will lie in the sunshine when the storm has cleared.*

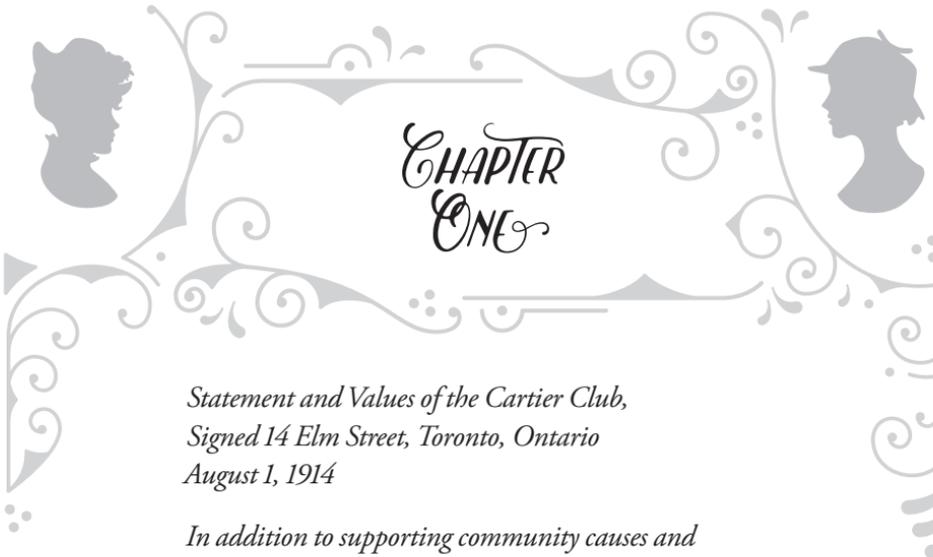
Arthur Conan Doyle, *His Last Bow*



*It is our duty to let Great Britain know and to let the friends and foes of Great Britain know that there is in Canada but one mind and one heart and that all Canadians are behind the Mother Country.*

Sir Wilfrid Laurier





# CHAPTER ONE

*Statement and Values of the Cartier Club,  
Signed 14 Elm Street, Toronto, Ontario  
August 1, 1914*

*In addition to supporting community causes and advocating for health and housing reform, the Cartier Club strives to provide newly arrived residents of Toronto with a seamless integration into the city. Fair wages and equal treatment for women and childcare have been added to the growing list of immediate reformation and necessity.*

*God save the King.*

War was on the tip of Merinda Herringford's tongue. The longer the Cartier Club meeting droned on, the more frequently her gaze wandered through the large windows of the third-floor meeting room of the Arts and Letters Club in hopes of catching a glimpse of the clock on the red tower shooting straight up from the grand, redbrick building at nearby City Hall. When she first joined the club, at Jasper's request, she was chuffed to be the only female in a conglomeration of well-meaning and socially progressive men. Now she stifled a yawn derived from boredom rather than exhaustion. How could one be bored when the world was shifting on its axis? She decided to play at observation.

"If tonight's ultimatum's result is war—" Horace Milbrook's small voice clashed with his large glasses and wide eyes, "then we can expect

that Mayor Montague will use this as an opportunity to extend his power even further. I am determined to use his almost certain precautions—which we can guarantee will see his Morality Squad in full force preying not just on women, but on any immigrant with a tie to one of the enemy countries—to further my own campaign.” Merinda noticed the arm on the right side of his spectacles was attached to the frame with string. Then she noticed the cuffs on his suit had been recently retailored. Milbrook needed to win the election when he ran against Montague in the coming months if only to keep himself and his family above water.

“An election during the inevitable war.” Constable Jasper Forth gave a low whistle, reclining in his chair. Merinda couldn’t credit Sherlock Holmes for her deciphering the message in Jasper’s body language. She was too familiar with the mannerisms of her longtime friend. He leaned back to overcompensate for the uneasiness he felt at the looming changes before them.

“It will skew everyone’s decision on our candidates thus far,” said Reverend Ethan Talbot. Merinda noticed nothing different about the minister. He maintained his level, pragmatic tone.

“What might that mean?” Jasper asked, studying the stern countenances of the men around the ornamented oak table.

“I suspect that will mean some sort of illegal enterprise with Thaddeus Spenser.”

“Arms smuggling and munitions?” Merinda positively twinkled. “How exciting!” She traded playing Sherlock Holmes to paying close attention.

“I should think rather devastating,” Dr. William Alexander countered.

“I have recently met our new British war agent.” The editor of the *Globe and Mail*, Alexander Waverley, entered the conversation. “His name is Philip Carr. He was sent here to assess how fit Canada’s largest city is for war. He’s often seen with Sir Henry Pelham.”

“I’ve seen his name in the papers,” Jasper said.

Every paper, including the *Hogtown Herald*, the lowest on the

rung of the city's journalistic hierarchy, had been fascinated with the Boer war hero Pelham and his wife, Lady Adelaide, especially during the construction of castle-like Pelham Park, their home built on a high vantage point over the city's core. The *Hog's* photos, in particular so varied and alluring, had been gaining photographer Skip McCoy a lot of attention.

"He has an office at City hall," Waverley said.

"Not the Armories?" Horace Milbrook's eyebrow shot up.

"Montague decided it would be better to have him nearby. Especially if he decides that he needs to put extra measures in place. You know how much Montague respects Pelham."\*

"It's exciting to speak about the potential of war," Dr. Alexander said, intervening. "But I would like to direct us back to the tuberculosis encasements and children's nursing stations on Elizabeth Street."

Merinda noticed, as per usual, that the doctor was well prepared to share his tactics and opinions. While her gaze kept drifting, she kept one ear attuned to the conversation around the table and became especially interested when Alexander spoke to the care they were taking in preventing Ward families from providing their children with diseased cow milk. He spoke of methods of pasteurization and the testing facilities and laboratories he was establishing. Conditions in the Ward were slowly progressing with his free seminars on sanitation and his footing the bill for several initiatives for clean water, but the men in the flophouses on Frederick Street still suffered while the immigrant women and children were placed first.

Alexander was still speaking of further improvements when the club turned at the sound of the heavy mahogany door creaking open on old hinges. Behind it, Ray DeLuca stood dabbing at his perspiration-sheened forehead with his rolled up sleeve. "Sorry I am late."

"I suppose the *Hog* is busy with a contingency plan should we declare war this evening," Jasper said, looking at Ray.

---

\* Montague's respect of Pelham was greatest when the affluent war hero contributed to City Hall's coffers. If Pelham had suggested his cook be the war agent, Merinda would not have been surprised if he were offered the job.

Ray dropped into a chair adjacent to Merinda. “We are doing what we can, but we all know that the *Globe*, the *Star*, and the *Tely* (here, Ray looked pointedly at Alexander Waverley) will doubtless be the immediate source.”

Ethan Talbot smiled. “We all started somewhere, Ray.”

“Your choices are the brave choices,” Waverley said. “Your prose runs a bit hyperbolic at times, which I think you know, but do not underestimate the readership you have, nor the voice that speaks for a part of Toronto’s infrastructure. Reporting will change during the war. I guarantee it.” Alexander chuckled and reached for his water. “For example, I have recently hired a young woman. With so many men promising to enlist, including some of my own reporters, I need to ensure that I have a contingency plan. Her name is Martha Kingston, late of the *Montreal Gazette*. She has a reputation for being a bit of a corker. Suffragette and all that. But she’ll go after a story. Trail it. And it will be nice to get the ladies’ perspective.” He looked at Merinda. “Home front charity and all that. *If* we go to war.”

Ray’s eyes had widened the moment Waverley mentioned an anticipated change of staff, and Jasper must have noticed, for he said with an encouraging nod at his friend, “You know, sir, Ray cannot enlist on account of his having lost part of his hearing.”

“Is that right?” Waverley said, shifting as if cornered.

“Left ear,” Ray said. “When on assignment in Chicago.”

Jasper and Merinda exchanged a look. Ray wasn’t necessarily on assignment so much as looped into foiling an anarchist plot and a bank robbery involving his brother-in-law.\*

The clock ticked several moments longer until the attendees were far too wired with the looming ultimatum to think of the rest of the day’s business.

Jasper, Merinda, and Ray soon spilled out from the Arts and Letters Club and into the blazing sun.

Alexander Waverley intercepted them, a folded newspaper under

---

\* The astute reader will recall these escapades as part of a previous adventure recorded as *A Lesson in Love and Murder*.

his arm. "I thought you might enjoy this, Miss Herringford," he said with a kind smile before handing her the paper, tipping his bowler, and crossing Elm Street.

Merinda unfolded it and noticed a picture of herself and Jem on the front page under the magnanimous headline: TORONTO'S WARD DETECTIVES BECOME NATIONAL CELEBRITIES.

"Impressive," said Ray. Since Jem and Merinda had returned from Chicago two summers previously, they had found a growing celebrity, and no longer were their stories exclusives to the *Hog*. While his own paper still sold, Ray missed the increase in sales whenever his lady detectives were responsible for solving a particularly prolific case. They had been appropriated by the city as a whole.

"What a picture!" Jasper said, looking over Merinda's shoulder.

It was, indeed, a rather striking preservation of a triumphant moment. Merinda, in a tilted bowler and loose cotton shirt and trousers, looked straight at the camera with just a phantom of her Cheshire grin hovering over her curved lips. Jemima's light eyes blazed through the image, her high cheekbones and bow-shaped mouth perfectly captured by the photographer's lens.

"Now there's a woman," a voice said from behind Ray's shoulder.

"Russell!" Jasper turned in recognition. "Merinda, Ray, you must meet Russell St. Clair. He's been newly assigned to my station. He transferred from Hamilton. The best part of his being here is that we might finally win the policeman's baseball pennant!" Jasper playfully slapped Russell on the back. "He's a cracker jacks short stop!"

"Well, I wouldn't go so far to say—"

Merinda cocked her head. "I assume when you said, 'Now there's a woman,' you were of course referring to myself?"

St. Clair was unfazed. "Of course. But I also meant the rather striking Miss Watts. I must confess that my interest in your amateur detective agency is heightened whenever there is a photograph of your lovely associate." (The way he said *amateur* made Merinda wrinkle her nose.) He extended his hand. "Miss Herringford."

"Clearly *I* am known to you." Merinda said, giving his hand a

quick shake. "But you must meet the lovely Jem's *husband*," she said pointedly, tugging Ray into clearer view.

"Ray DeLuca," Ray said pleasantly, extending his hand.

Russell St. Clair blinked. "DeLuca. Of the *Hogtown Herald*?"

"The very same."

"Surely you are in jest." Russell turned to Merinda. "It's my understanding that Miss Jemima Watts is, like you, a bachelor girl detective."

"Miss Jemima Watts is actually Mrs. Jemima DeLuca," Jasper supplied.

"But—"

"Upon Jem's nuptials, I made an executive decision—" Merinda began.

"One of many," Ray interrupted under his breath.

"I made the decision," Merinda resumed, "that our clients would be more familiar with Herringford and Watts. Besides, we'd already had the sign made."

St. Clair looked to Ray. "And how did a muckraking reporter find himself so fortunate as to wed such a beautiful woman?"

Ray laughed softly. "I am sure I do not know."

"Nonsense," Jasper said. "Ray is the best fellow in the world. In fact—"

"Listen, Jasper," Russell cut in, clearly uninterested in Jasper's appraisal of Ray. "I only came by to see if you wanted to grab a bite of lunch. Kirk told me I might find you here."

"I must be off," Ray said with a tip of his bowler. "Nice to meet you, Mr. St. Clair."

"Constable," St. Clair coldly corrected.

"*Constable* St. Clair." Ray enunciated the title carefully before turning back to his friends. "Jasper, Merinda, shall we plan on meeting near the northwest corner of City Hall tonight?"

"Half past six?" Merinda asked.

"Half past six," Ray agreed, swerving in the direction of Cabbagetown and his home on Parliament Street.

“So that was Ray DeLuca,” St. Clair said, watching his retreating figure.

“Shall we go to the Wellington?” Jasper didn’t respond to his colleague’s comment, but rather pointed to the restaurant directly across from City Hall.

A short stroll later, they were settled in the diner, and over messy corned beef, Jasper and Russell bored Merinda with talk of baseball and the policeman’s pennant. Not one to feign interest where she had none, Merinda leaned her chin on her hand and watched the usual lunchtime rush filter in. After droning on about plays and scores, and waxing loquaciously about the details of his recent transfer, Russell drew Merinda’s attention back by harping on his perception of Toronto’s real problem.

“Germans and Italians,” he said with a pronounced thwack of his hand on the table, sparing his company from the racist slurs Merinda was sure he usually used in conjunction with his diatribes. “You watch.” St. Clair’s voice was almost a hiss. “They will turn on us so quickly. Staying true to their sordid motherlands and all that nonsense.” He looked at Jasper. “You think this DeLuca is a friend of yours. He’ll use that paper to drum up support to overthrow law and order. I guarantee it.” He took a big bite of his sandwich.

Merinda snorted. “You have no idea what you are talking about, Mr. St. Clair. When the anarchists were blowing up trolleys in the city not two years ago, DeLuca was using his influence to stop the exuberance for anarchy from spreading in the Ward.”

“He saved my life,” Jasper said, his water goblet poised in his hand. “There’s enough corruption in our own department without focusing on perceived and unfounded prejudice against people like Ray DeLuca.” Jasper took a sip before saying, “Really, St. Clair, I love having a new mate on the squad, but I don’t agree with your views.”

Russell looked at Merinda. “Surely you, a forward-looking woman, can see the tidal wave that will overtake us the moment Britain declares war.”

Merinda almost squawked a laugh. “Tidal wave? I think war will offer more opportunities for women! Why, just last week the *Globe* ran a piece on how women will be allowed to participate in target practice! I have waited my entire life to shoot a rifle!”

“She has,” Jasper affirmed, stabbing a bite of coleslaw.

“And your beautiful friend will join you?” St. Clair asked, his eyebrows raised as if attempting to envision what Herringford and Watts might look like handling rifles.

“She will.” Merinda nodded.

“I am surprised Miss Watts...erm...Mrs. DeLuca—” (Merinda didn’t like the way he said her name) “—is not a part of this Cartier Club endeavor.”

“When we formed the Cartier Club, little Hamish had just been born,” Jasper explained. “Jem was quite preoccupied.”

“I keep hearing it around the station.” St. Clair shoved his empty plate away from him. “The Cartier Club.”

“Some men and *woman*,” Jasper said, nodding toward Merinda, “feel Toronto has been given a great responsibility to serve those who have chosen to make it their home.” He expounded on the work of their group and its advocacy for women and immigrants, fair wages, and a desire to impart the promise of acceptance and morality of the century before. He then used the earlier meeting to give Russell a taste of what was occupying their time that very morning. Merinda was preoccupied with waving a waitress over to take her order of pie.

“But all of what you say is what Mayor Montague has been trying to do,” St. Clair said. “That was part of the reason I was so eager for my Toronto transfer. To experience firsthand his vision for the city’s progress.”

“But at the expense of so many!” Merinda countered, her eyes widening at the large slice of apple pie and cheddar cheese set in front of her.

“Do you feel the same way as Merinda, Jasper?” Russell turned to the other constable, who was watching Merinda tuck into her pie with admiration.

"I truly believe we could be making a lot more effort to find 'the least of these' comfort, clean lodging, and opportunity for gainful employment."

"But is that not what Spenser is doing with making jobs available to the newest immigrants and Montague's homes for working men?" St. Clair asked.

"Flophouses," Merinda said through a mouthful.

"The longer you stay in Toronto, Russell," Jasper said sadly, "the more you will be privy to the abhorrent conditions and unfair wages Spenser passes off as 'charity.' The Cartier Club is dedicated to helping change the city's concept of reform."

"But surely," St. Clair said, beginning on a second cup of coffee, "you're in favor of the close partnership between Mayor Montague and Chief Tipton."

Merinda, knowing Jasper had several thoughts on this alliance, none positive and most exclaimed in sentences that painted their relationship as one of a puppeteer and puppet, waited eagerly to see what her friend would say.

Jasper gave him a typically diplomatic response. "Of course I believe that all leadership should work together seamlessly to ensure the success of our city's infrastructure."

Merinda knew, in that moment, that while Jasper enjoyed Russell's company and their camaraderie on the baseball field, he didn't trust him.

"Spoken like a true politician," St. Clair said with a chuckle, rising and placing a few coins on the table. "I must get back to the grind." He tipped his cap. "Miss Herringford."

Merinda, again interested in her pie, gave him a limp wave without looking up. After finishing their meal—Jasper reaching for the check—they strolled up Queen Street.

"Now you can tell me what you really think," Merinda said brightly, sensing his eyes studying her profile.

With her chin tipped up and green eyes blazing forward, she took in the usual bustle of the day. Trolleys rumbled, quaking the ground

with their speed and weight, while a lone constable directed traffic as horses and carts and automobiles flowed around him. Spenser's customers were spilling out of the grand department store, holding their parcels and wares. Newsies hawked their headlines all about the War Ultimatum on either side of the street, bellowing promise of a special edition on the deadline for war declaration.

"Chaos will erupt," Jasper said as Merinda recognized a familiar face and pressed a nickel into Kat's palm for a copy of the *Hog*, whose headline declared: TORONTO ON THE BRINK.

If Germany failed to meet the ultimatum and pull back from their invasion of France and Belgium by eleven p.m. Greenwich mean time that evening, there would be war. Toronto was a supremely British city, and Jasper and Merinda knew its population would trip over itself to help the motherland. It was all anyone had talked about all summer, and despite the ripples of excitement and fervor, Jasper couldn't help but look ruefully at the changes erupting around him.

"Are we going to go to war?" Merinda asked as he led her across the street.

"The signs have been pointing that way all summer," Jasper said gravely. "Ever since that poor chap Ferdinand."

"What does that mean for us?"

"I can't rightly be sure. But we have to make certain that if we go to war for England, we have done all we can to make our world worth fighting for—"

"A Toronto worth fighting for?" Merinda interpreted.

Jasper nodded. "I love this city, as do you. But we're fighting our own battle. How can we expect to give our all to a conflict a world away when we can't keep men like Montague and Tipton from waging battle against the people trying so hard to make a life here? Women, immigrants..."

"That fiend Russell St. Clair isn't helping," Merinda said drily.

Jasper couldn't disagree. "I saw a different side of him today."

They walked without speaking for a few moments. Then Merinda broke a settling silence. "Things are changing, aren't they?"

“That’s all you’ve ever wanted, Merinda. Change.”

“I love change!” She recovered. “But I fear it all the same.”

“Fear? This from a woman who begged her parents for a roadster that could out-speed most of the automobiles in Toronto!”

“Is this your asking for a ride back to the station, Constable Forth?”

Jasper laughed while Merinda tugged him in a slight detour from their stroll, backtracking to Elm Street and to where her car was parked.

“I cannot believe your parents bought you an automobile,” Jasper said as he again admired the sheened veneer. He opened the passenger door and slid in. “Did they never hear about your reckless adventures on a police motor bicycle?” He winked.\*

Merinda pressed the heel of her brogan to the pedal, and they drove off into the afternoon.



“TORONTO ON THE BRINK.”

Jemima DeLuca read the *Hog* aloud to Hamish, who was watching her with interest, his knees under him and his bright blue eyes looking up at her, comprehending little but enamored with the rise and fall of her voice and her animated expressions. Jem set down the paper, leaned forward, and kissed the fourteen-month-old on the forehead, directly under the fringe of his black curls. Hamish responded by grabbing one of her fingers in his pudgy fingers and holding on tightly, babbling about something in a language that was sounding decidedly more like English by the day.

They turned simultaneously at the jangle of keys in the door. Ray walked in the parlor a moment later, swept his hat off his head, and ruffled his hair. “Hot out there,” he said, leaning down to kiss Jem before swooping up Hamish and kissing him. “Reading the paper, I see,” he said to Hamish, who reached up to grab his father’s nose.

---

\* This adventure is mentioned in the case entitled *Of Dubious and Questionable Memory*.

Ray sat his son down near the window, where the boy occupied himself with blocks before lifting himself up, balancing with a hold on the window sill, and watching the bustle in the heart of Cabbagetown.

Ray joined Jem on the sofa and stole another kiss. "How are you?"

"Hot and bored," Jem said, fingering a sticky errant curl at her neck. "How was the meeting?"

The eagerness in her eyes told Ray exactly how much she hated being left out of the Cartier Club. Since Hamish's birth, she had adapted to numerous limitations. While she relied on Mrs. Malone and Jasper's mother to take Hamish while she assisted on Merinda's cases, Ray could see that a part of her wanted to be a part of their enterprises. She was pulled in two directions, much as he had long been when still responsible for financially supporting his sister, Viola, while beginning to build a life with Jem. Though the tragic consequences of a case in Chicago resulted in Viola becoming estranged from him, he was able to fill his days (and some late nights) with the *Hog* and his nonworking hours with his beautiful wife and too-fast-growing son. He sensed Jem wanted to find a bit more balance. A long convalescence after Hamish was born, the inevitable sleepless nights, and constant care a baby required made certain that it was several months before she was able to resume her detective adventures with Merinda.

"Dr. Alexander is doing some wonderful work with hygiene, especially in children's tuberculosis prevention." His eyes drifted toward Hamish, who was talking and pointing at something through the window. Ray couldn't understand him, but he knew his son's mind was working a mile a minute as he took in every sound and sight of the street.

"I bet everyone was talking of the war."

Ray nodded. The war unsettled him. He wanted to keep to lighter topics. "Alexander Waverley has hired new reporters to compensate for the men he feels will enlist."

"So he feels that the war is a certainty?"

"Most everyone does, my love."

“Then perhaps he has a job for you.” Jem brightened. “Did you tell him you would not be eligible to enlist?”

Ray nodded. “I did but...” He shrugged. “It’s no use.”

Jem grabbed Ray’s hand. “Don’t give up your one dream, Ray DeLuca. The world is changing. Indeed—” she reached for the discarded edition of the *Hog* and held it up to him. “A rather brilliant piece in the *Hogtown Herald* believes that Toronto is on the brink! I choose to believe we are on the brink of something exciting, and one of the many changes will see people being able to step into worlds they have dared not go to before. Maybe a *Hogtown Herald* reporter finding employment at the *Globe and Mail*! Once and for all.”

Ray gave her a half smile. “He offered Martha Kingston a job even before me.”

“That must have stung,” Jem said with a click of her tongue.

“It did, but—” A knock at the door interrupted him. He rose to answer it.

A moment later, Ray ushered Mouse into the sitting room. The girl first ruffled Hamish’s curls, much to his delight, before turning to Ray and Jem.

“Telegram, Mrs. DeLuca.”

“You can call me Jem, Mouse.”

Ray pressed a coin into Mouse’s hand for her trouble while Jem read the telegram.

“Client at King Street,” she said as Ray returned from seeing Mouse out the door. “I suppose I will just follow Merinda to City Hall this evening.” Jem stood and went to the hall mirror, where she affixed a cap to her curls.

“What about Hamish?” Ray asked as the baby ran to him, holding up one of his blocks for Ray’s approval. Ray DeLuca’s usual half-moon smile always surrendered fully when Hamish was in view, and it spread wide now.

Jem turned in the archway separating the front hallway and the parlor. “I’ll arrange for Mrs. Malone to mind him.”

“Mrs. Malone has been minding him quite a lot lately, Jemima,”

Ray said, still smiling at Hamish and passing the block back to him, only to have Hamish toddle to the window again, find another, and present it in a similar fashion.

“Ray, I don’t want to bring him tonight. It will be crowded with people, and he might get tired or scared and flustered.”

“Nor do you want to stay and mind him.”

“Do you?”

“You know I have to be there in case McCormick needs me for a last-minute assignment.” Though Ray had an independent streak at work that often found him butting heads with his boss, Oliver McCormick, he wouldn’t dream of missing the opportunity of the biggest story of the year.

“You told me you had done what you can, and that you wouldn’t be required at the office until after the event so long as Skip was there.”

“I am just saying—”

“Ray, you knew from the moment Hamish was born that I would be taking care of him while still assisting Merinda.”

“I know, and you have done a lot of assisting.”

“You never expected me to stay at home.”

“Jem...”

Jem strode over to Ray, brushed his hair back from his forehead, and kissed his head. “You know I will take care of him. No harm will come to Hamish. He is the most important thing in my life other than you, you frustrating man. But I also want to enjoy the fact that the city has finally embraced us! That our celebrity is keeping the Morality Squad off our heels! That Merinda and I can wear trousers and hats freely as a sort of uniform rather than a deterrent from pursuit.”

“You want both.”

Jem nodded. “As long as Hamish is safe with Mrs. Malone, I will be dashing off to assist Merinda!” She brushed her lips over his before turning to Hamish, who was in the midst of selecting another block. “Goodbye, duckling!” she said, picking Hamish up and kissing him on both cheeks. “I will see you this evening.”

“When the world ends,” Ray added drily.