

The Pocket Watch
By Leigh M. Rose

“You say the maid found him just sitting like this, like he was just looking out the window?”

“Yeah, she’s over there giving her statement. Her English ain’t great.”

“Oh yeah, neither is yours.”

“Whatever. Apparently, she had worked for the guy for a long time and liked him real well. She said he paid for her kid to go to college.”

“Sounds like he was pretty generous; an employer who pays his for Hispanic maid’s kid to go to college; you don’t see that every day. You think it was a suicide?”

“Don’t know, no signs of trauma or any kind of break-in, could be an overdose, suicide, heart attack, stroke, aneurism; who knows?”

“He looks kind of young for a heart attack or stroke.”

“Don’t let that fool you. One of my wife’s cousins just dropped dead one day. He was getting ready to take the dog for a walk and fell over right at the front door. Thirty years old and had a massive heart attack.”

“No kidding.”

“Yeah, they said it was some kind of heart defect. He didn’t even know he had it.”

“Shit, makes you want to go get checked out.”

“Yeah, tell me about it. There’s the M.E. now, she’ll pronounce him and then we can move the guy to the morgue for an autopsy.”

“What about next of kin?”

“The maid said she didn’t think he had any family, she said he mentioned something to her once about outliving all his family.”

“Hello there guys, any signs of foul play?”

“No, looks like he just sat down to have a Scotch and a pretty nice Scotch at that, wish I could afford his brand; and then just keeled over.”

“Okay, I’ll pronounce him, then while they load him up to take him to the morgue I’ll look around and see if I can find any medications he might have been taking. Nice looking guy too and young. Looks like late twenties, early thirties at the most.”

Tonya Morris the Medical Examiner for Fayette County wasn’t much older herself. One of the youngest Medical Examiners in the country if not the youngest, that’s what you get for being an overachiever. You get to cut open bodies and figure out what killed them.

Tonya left the two detectives and walked across the room to the arched floor-to-ceiling windows that ran the length of the wall and were typical of the old buildings in downtown Lexington. “Nice view,” she said. She turned her back to the windows and surveyed the room. There was a fireplace with what looked like gas logs, but a much higher quality than the gas logs in her house, a bungalow in Chevy Chase. In the dining area, there were two oil portraits, one of a man, the other a woman, hanging over a large antique sideboard. Judging from the clothes, they looked to be from the 1920’s. Other than the hairstyle the man in the painting was the spitting image of the deceased. Must have been his grandparents or great-grandparents she thought. Tonya took in all the details of the large spacious room, antiques, a granite bar, crystal barware, big TV.

“What do you think?” Detective Thompson asked.

“I think this place looks like it popped right out of Architectural Digest, high-end antiques and top-of-the-line conveniences; he obviously had money.”

“The maid said he was an antique importer and exporter and dealt with art a little too.”

Tonya glanced at the deceased as he was loaded onto the gurney and thought to herself “another overachiever.” “Guys, I’m going to check out the bathrooms, bedrooms, the kitchen cabinets and then head out.” Tonya walked down the hall to the master bathroom suite. The walk-in shower in the master bath had multiple heads and jets that could be moved to shower your body from any angle. The countertops were dark marble with two bowl sinks. The details of the room had a 1920’s art deco feel to it.

She pulled open the drawers, they looked like real mahogany. No medications of any kind, no cold tablets, antacids, not even an aspirin. That was unusual. She looked behind towels, in the toilet tank, just in case there was a stash of illegal drugs; nothing at all. Tonya then checked the dresser and nightstand drawers. She opened the large wardrobe expecting a television; instead there were rows of starched and pressed dress shirts and matching silk ties. “Wow.” It reminded her of the scene where Daisy pulls Gatsby’s shirts from the wardrobe and then cries about how many beautiful shirts he has. Tonya said aloud to herself. “If it weren’t for the iPhone on the dresser I would swear I had stepped into the past.”

Tonya searched the guest bath and spare bedroom and the kitchen cabinets and found the same, no medications of any sort; not over the counter or prescription. There weren't even any vitamins. "This guy must have never even had a stuffy nose."

"You still here," Thompson remarked.

"Yes, I'm just going to take a quick look in his office then head back."

"We didn't see anything in there. And the maid said nothing looked out of place."

"Are you collecting any evidence? Not unless you tell us this guy didn't just keel over of natural causes. I would guess a rich guy like this had a will and probably some trust fund or something, so if everything checks out, we'll just find his next of kin or his attorney and they will take it from there."

Tonya stepped into the office and flipped the light switch. The room had the same floor-to-ceiling arched windows. She walked over to the windows and looked down at the street below. It had begun to rain and pedestrians, some with umbrellas; some with jackets or a copy of the daily paper over their heads were running from building to building. The office was the same as the living and dining areas of the loft, high-end antiques and top-of-the-line technology. Tonya sat down in the leather-upholstered chair behind the large oak desk. A vintage Mont Blanc fountain pen lay beside a laptop. To her left was a small stack of personalized embossed stationery with the deceased name, Sean O'Brennen and to the right a silver ink blotter. She was surprised she even knew what it was. Tonya pulled open each drawer and looked inside; she noticed how neat and organized they were. Either he was getting his affairs in order or he was a little OCD. Nothing wrong with that she thought.

She glanced up at the framed photographs sitting on the corner of the desk. Some were black and white and obviously older, some were color, and looked to have been taken in the last few years, and all were in antique silver frames. In two of the photographs she saw the same faces from the oil paintings. Again, in one photo the clothes the man and woman were wearing were from probably the 1920's. In the second photograph the woman was at least twenty years older, but the man looked to be the same age. "It must be the son, but no two people can look that much alike." Tonya looked at another photograph; there was the man again, but this time with another man who bore a strong resemblance. The name Patrick was written under this other man. Probably a brother she thought. Then she remembered something from the living room. As she stood up from the desk her hand bumped the corner of the laptop, moving it slightly and exposing a piece of paper. Tonya sat back down and pulled the piece of paper from under the laptop; it was a note written on the embossed stationery and signed by Sean O'Brennen.

You will find my journals here in the study on the shelves to the far right. I have also taken time to scan them and they are on a thumb drive in my desk. All other instructions are in my will with the exception of one. My pocket watch must be destroyed. It is a curse I would not wish on anyone.

"So, did you commit suicide Sean O'Brennen, or were you dying and just getting your affairs in order?" Tonya looked up at the photos again then back to the desk. "Okay, where would I put a thumb drive for safekeeping? Anything small that I need to get my hands on, I always put in the middle drawer" Tonya pulled it open and looked inside again. She bent down and felt toward the back of the drawer. "I got you."

Just then Detective Thompson walked in. “You find anything?”

She closed her hand around the small thumb drive. “Just some dust, that’s about it.” She wasn’t sure why she lied; she wasn’t in the habit of lying.

“We’re going to leave one of the uniform guys here with you. We got to go; the uniforms will lock up and seal the door after you leave.”

“Sure, I’ll only be a few more minutes. I’ll call you when I start the autopsy.”

“Yeah, just let us know if you find anything.”

As Detective Thompson walked out Tonya slipped the thumb drive and the note into her pocket. She had never done anything like this before and couldn’t explain why she did this now, but she wanted to read the journals before anyone else got to them. Tonya pulled her camera out of her bag and quickly snapped some photographs of the framed photos on the desk. Then noticing a small cluster of framed photos sitting on a reading table, again in antique silver frames she snapped photographs of those as well. She then returned to the dining and living area of the loft and snapped photographs of the oil paintings and a small framed photograph that had caught her attention earlier; it was of the man and woman from the oil paintings with two young children sitting atop ponies. In the corner was written Patrick and Ruthie, May 1933. After she had finished photographing the apartment, she thanked the officer then left.

Once in her car, she called the morgue and spoke to her assistant. “There is a body on its way, a Sean O’Brennen in his late twenties early thirties. Don’t do anything to prep the body until I get there. Don’t even remove the clothing. No, I don’t suspect anything at this point, but he was a young guy, reportedly good health and just dropped

dead. Okay, thanks.” She ended the call and refocused her attention on driving and the rain that was beginning to come down harder.

It was late afternoon; there would be just enough time to prep the body but not enough time to start the autopsy. In the autopsy room Tonya put on rubber gloves and searched Sean O’Brennen’s clothing for the pocket watch mentioned in the note. Other than a gold Claddagh ring on his left ring finger and a silver Saint Michael medal that hung from a chain around his neck there was no other jewelry. As she started to cut away the clothing, she felt something in the inside breast pocket of his jacket. She put her fingers inside the pocket and pulled out an old faded and cracked photograph. It was the man and woman from the oil paintings. The man was wearing a World War I army uniform; the woman was in a nurse’s uniform. She turned the photograph over and read the name and date written on the back.

Sean O’Brennen and Elizabeth Hicks, Southampton, England 17 October 1918.

Tonya looked at the photograph and then at the face of the deceased Sean O’Brennen. They looked identical. “Who are you?”

Just then her assistant entered the autopsy room. “Hi, Doctor Morris.”

“Hello, Jeff I didn’t hear you come in.” She slid the photograph into the pocket of her lab coat.”

“I just walked through the door. Did I startle you?”

“No, I was deep in thought. I was just getting started. Let’s remove the clothes and bag any personal belonging then start the autopsy tomorrow. At least for now it appears to be natural causes and the detectives have a homicide with two victims they are working so they aren’t in a rush for this one.”

“They are working two homicides in Lexington in one day?”

“It was a domestic dispute. I heard they have the husband in custody now. Looks like he shot his wife and her boyfriend.”

After they finished Tonya left her assistant to clean up then went back to her office. She pulled the photograph from her pocket and stared at it. She logged into her computer and clicked the internet icon. She googled Sean O’Brennen and found nothing. Then she googled Elizabeth Hicks, again found nothing. Next, she accessed the Lexington, Fayette County Archives and again searched their names. This time she found a reference to a Sean O’Brennen leading a group of wealthy citizens to raise money for Good Samaritan Hospital. There was a photograph, it wasn’t very clear, but it looked amazingly like the body in the morgue. But the date, this Sean O’Brennen would now be in his seventies or early eighties. Then she searched Elizabeth Hicks. An Elizabeth Hicks was listed as a nurse with the Barrow Unit, Good Samaritan Hospital Unit 40 that was stationed near Southampton, England during the First World War. There was no photograph, but it had to be the same woman.

It was after six in the afternoon. She dropped the photo into her computer bag along with the thumb drive then logged off. “I’ll do this at home.”

On the way she picked up carry-out Chinese. She didn’t want to waste time cooking anything, not even a sandwich. She still couldn’t believe she took the thumb drive and then lied, just as she couldn’t believe she had taken the picture. Tonya parked her car in the driveway then went in the side door. She put her computer bag and carry-out on the kitchen table then retrieved her personal laptop from her office. She placed it on the coffee table in the living room and turned it on. It would only take a few

seconds to boot up but she didn't want to waste a minute. Changing into sweatpants and an oversized sweater then returning to the kitchen she poured a glass of Shiraz from a bottle she had opened the day before, picked up her carry-out and a fork and settled down on the couch.

"I hope this was worth it." She inserted the thumb drive into the USB port. There looked to be about fifty pdf files and one Word document. The pdf files were named by date beginning with 1886 and ending just last week. She opened the file labeled 1886-1900. It listed names of people with dates of birth, marriage and death, a brief family history of the OBrennen's. The scanned pages had been written in long hand and were a little hard to read. She closed the file and opted to start with the Word document.

Do not let appearances deceive; I am a very old man. I was born Sean Patrick O'Brennen in Kilkenny, Ireland 15 June 1886 the oldest son of Liam and Mary O'Brennen. Our family was nearly destitute; I managed to save enough money to buy passage to America where I would find work and then send for the rest of my family.

It was 14 April 1912; we were midway through our voyage when our great ship struck an iceberg and began to sink. It was my duty to help the women and children board the lifeboats but I was frightened for myself, I did not want to die and I thought of my family in Kilkenny, who now might surely starve without the money I would send home.

I stood by the railing and I watched the people in the boats row far away from the ship. Sorrow overcame me, and as I began to cry a Gentleman aged about fifty years put his hand on my shoulder. By his clothes and his carriage, I

could see he was a man of great means. He asked my story, I told him of my family and how I came to be on the ship. He said so you are alone on this vessel and I replied I was. He then pointed behind him to his wife and children. He said all the boats were gone. He could save himself but not them, so he had chosen to save me.

He took my hand in his. My hand was shaking from the cold. He instructed me to take his pocket watch. I didn't understand. Then he took the watch key and pushed it into the palm of my hand so hard that my hand started to bleed. Then he inserted the key into the back of the watch and told me to wind the watch, but not too tight. I held the watch in my bleeding hand and wound it with the bloody key that hung on the watch chain. He told me that now my blood ran through the watch and as the watch ticked so would my heartbeat, but if I failed to keep the watch wound and it stopped ticking then my heart would also stop.

I could feel a warmth come over me as I wound the watch and like a miracle the cut on my hand was gone. The Gentleman told me he had lived many years and was far older than he appeared but because the watch can have only one owner, he could not save his family and so he would perish with them. Pass the watch to someone else and you live out your life and die a natural death he said, but let the watch stop ticking and you die with it.

I could not understand why this Gentleman would choose me for such a gift. He just told me to use it wisely but in time I would grow to see it as a curse.

He told me to hold tight to the watch, pin it inside my clothes where I could not lose it, then jump into the water and swim for one of the boats. Just

before I jumped, he handed me a leather pouch with more money than I had ever imagined in all my life. He told me to make a good life. Then I jumped.

Tonya stopped reading and took a long sip of the Shiraz. “This is weird. He must have been working on a novel. Well, since you can find almost anything online these days let’s just see if I can find Mister O’Brennen on the passenger list of the Titanic. How many other ships struck an iceberg?”

Tonya googled *Titanic*. “There must be hundreds of websites.” She found one with a complete passenger listing. “Okay a poor young Irish guy would be in third class.” To her surprise there was a Sean O’Brennen listed as a third-class passenger and according to the list he survived. “It could be a great-great-grandfather or a very odd coincidence. Or maybe he is a con man and created an identity and a history for himself.” Tonya clicked back to the Word document and continued to read.

In it, Sean O’Brennen wrote about being pulled from the lifeboats the next morning and then arriving in America. He wrote about sending word home to his family that he had survived along with some of the money the Gentleman had given him. He spoke of not being able to find work and then with some of the money starting a furniture business where he bought and sold used and discarded pieces. He wrote about sending money home to his family so they could remain in Ireland and about joining the Army to fight in the War to End all Wars, and the carnage in the trenches.

My brigade was sent back to England for a brief respite. It was there at one of the hospitals I met a nurse named Elisabeth Hicks, who would become my wife. She told me many stories of her home in Lexington, the rolling hills she

described made me think of my home in Ireland, so I returned there with her and we were married.

Sean O'Brennen went on to write about dinners with Elizabeth at the Phoenix Hotel, seeing the first talkies at the Kentucky Theater and about his son Patrick, who was killed in World War II, of the heartbreak of outliving his wife, then over time seeing their favorite Lexington landmarks that held so many memories, torn down in the name of progress, and then his daughter Ruth's death in a car accident and of being alone after everyone he loved had long since passed away and his guilt for having this gift of life and youth when others did not. And finally of his decision to allow the watch to stop and then have it destroyed. He was afraid that if he destroyed it himself somehow the curse would continue, and his life would continue.

"Nice story," she said aloud. "This is ridiculous that I would even consider this is possible. He obviously had a great imagination and decided to write a story, or he was a little crazy and really believed this stuff." Tonya stood up and paced across the floor of her living room. "He looked so much like the man in the painting. Maybe he thought he was the reincarnation of a dead relative." Tonya hadn't found the pocket watch when she searched for medications. Perhaps the watch was just part of his imagination. There really was no watch. But if there was; then it was probably still in the apartment or he had put it in a safe deposit box so as it wound down he wouldn't be able to get to it and change his mind.

No, she thought, I would keep it near me in case I changed my mind. I don't care how old you are, or think you are, death is scary even when you are prepared for it. Tonya bent down and turned on the gas for her logs and then pressed the switch to ignite

them. “I have to get back in that apartment.” She sat down and ate the last few bites of her noodles and then poured a second glass of wine.

The next day in the morgue Tonya with her assistant Jeff performed the autopsy on Sean Patrick O’Brennen. His body was in perfect condition, too perfect to have died. There were no drugs or poisons in his system and his internal organs looked almost pristine.

“Doctor Morris, this is the healthiest dead guy I have ever seen.”

“Yeah me too, I can’t find anything that killed him. I need to examine the heart closer; I’m guessing there is an undetected heart defect.”

“What a bitch, young, good-looking and money then you just drop. Kind of a waste isn’t it.”

“Yes it is. But I usually don’t think about it. It doesn’t pay to get emotionally wrapped up in a case. After all, they are dead and there is nothing I can do about it other than help provide closure by identifying cause of death.” Tonya removed her rubber gloves and tossed them in the hazardous waste bin. “Jeff, why don’t you finish up here. I’ve got a couple calls I need to make, and I need to get started on the report.” Back in her office Tonya pulled the thumb drive from her briefcase and inserted it into her computer. She opened the pdf file dated the week prior. Maybe O’Brennen left a clue as to where he hid his pocket watch. She checked her voice mail as she waited for the file to open. There were two calls from her mother, one from a friend wanting to make lunch plans and a fourth from her doctor Sara Oldham. Tonya closed her eyes and took a deep breath as she listened to the message. It just said to call her, they needed to talk.

Tonya put the receiver in the cradle and closed her eyes. “Not again.” Then she picked up the phone and dialed Doctor Sara Oldham.

“Doctor Oldham’s office how can I direct your call?”

“This is Doctor Tonya Morris. I have a message to call Doctor Oldham.” She had learned that she always received faster service when she identified herself as a fellow doctor rather than a patient.”

“Just a minute please while I put you on hold and see if she is with a patient.”

Tonya listened. “What is the world coming to when The Rolling Stones have been turned into Musak?”

“Hi, Tonya, this is Sara Oldham. Sorry if I kept you waiting.”

“That’s okay I wasn’t on the line long.”

“Tonya, I would like you to come in for some more tests. The biopsy results were not good.”

“Is it back?”

“It is likely, but I want to confirm the results.” Tonya was silent. “Are you alright? Would you like to talk?”

“Not right now, I’m at work.”

“Okay then I’ll transfer you back to the desk and they can make an appointment for you. But if you need to talk between now and then please call me.”

Tonya made an appointment for Thursday afternoon then hung up the phone. She closed her eyes and sighed, then returned her attention to the computer and the pdf file.

She wanted the distraction. She began scanning for any reference to the pocket watch.

“All that technology in his apartment and the guy wrote his diary by hand.” Finally, she

found a reference to his pocket watch. He wrote about winding it carefully and each night placing it in a leather case in his bedroom, and then he went on to write about contemplating letting the watch run down.

“The only case I saw was the jewelry case and there was nothing in it except cufflinks, bracelets, a couple of necklaces and some tie pins. Unless it had a false bottom, or he just didn’t put it there the day he died and he put it someplace else.”

Tonya leaned back in her desk chair and tapped her fingers on the mouse. A habit she had when she was thinking. “There is no such thing as magic and there is certainly no such thing as magic or cursed watches.” She was angry with herself and she tapped her fingers again on the mouse then picked up the phone and dialed. “Thompson, how are you doing?”

“I’m good. You got anything for me?”

“No actually I don’t have anything. Sean O’Brennen was the picture of health and there was no evidence of foul play.”

“That’s good so I can close this one.”

“Actually, I wanted to ask a favor.”

“Shoot.”

“I would like to get into his apartment and look around again.”

“Why, you suspect something.”

“Not really, it’s just that he was healthy and young, and I want to see if maybe I missed something. Some sort of chemical or cleaner anything additional that I should test for. I don’t know, usually a cause of death pops out at me, but nothing did this time.”

“Yeah sure, no problem. I’m getting off at five today, why don’t you just meet me there say five-thirty and I’ll let you in.”

“Okay thanks. See you then.” Tonya again began scanning the files on the thumb drive. She read how he survived a mustard gas attack during The Great War; she read how he tried to give his son the watch before he left for war and his son’s refusal, his wife’s death and his daughter’s resentment and estrangement and eventual death in a car accident. Tonya paused and wondered if living forever was worth it. She glanced at her watch. “Oh shit!” It was almost five, she had been reading for four hours. “God, I’m going to be late, Thompson is going to be waiting on me and I am going to have so much work to catch up tomorrow.” Tonya closed the file, put the thumb drive in her briefcase then logged off her computer and rushed out her office.

“Sorry I’m late; I was tied up with paperwork.”

“No problem, I just got here myself. So, what exactly are you looking for?”

“I’m not sure. I want to see what kind of cleansers he used, see if there are any other chemicals. Just have a general look around again.”

The two stepped into an elevator that was once used for freight; Thompson closed the cage-style door then pressed the button for the third floor. “I tell you what, my wife is goin’ to kill me if I’m late again tonight, our daughter has a piano thing and I missed the last two. I shouldn’t do this, but I’ll make sure you get in okay then leave the keys with you. If you just make sure everything is turned off and locked up, then I’ll take off. That alright with you?”

Tonya couldn’t believe her luck. Now she could spend as much time as she needed searching for the watch. “No problem. I’m a big girl, I’ll be alright, I’ll keep the

door locked while I'm inside. Just take some samples of what I find, if anything, and then lock up when I leave. And I have your cell number on speed-dial if I need you."

Thompson winked and stuck his thumb up in the air. "Perfect."

After Thompson left, Tonya went straight to the master bedroom. There was the leather jewelry case sitting in the middle of the dresser just as it was the day before, when she was there to pronounce the body. She could feel her heart beating faster. She opened the case. Cufflinks, tie pins, everything was still there. She removed the items and began to look for a false bottom or other compartments. Nothing. She searched each drawer carefully removing the contents then replacing the items so that nothing would appear disturbed. After finding nothing in the bedroom she decided the next most likely place would be his study. There was a cigar box on the desk, she opened it and removed what she suspected were Cuban cigars. She picked up the box. It was thicker than it was deep. "False bottom." She opened the hidden compartment but the only item in the box was what looked like a desk key. She tried the key. It fit the desk, but he had left the desk drawers unlocked.

Tonya was frustrated. She was certain she would just walk in and find the watch. But that would be too easy. Nothing is that easy. Life isn't easy. She recalled that in the note he left under his computer he specifically mentioned his journals. Maybe there was something in one of them, in the hard copies that he had not scanned. Maybe he mentioned the journals because they tell where he hid the watch. She hoped the watch wasn't locked away in a safe deposit box. She would never get access to that.

Tonya walked across the study to the bookcase that ran half the length of the far wall. "Wow, this guy really liked to read. He has all the classics and every major work

from the last 60 years. Sean O'Brennen, I don't know if you really were a hundred and twenty plus years old; but even if you weren't you sure would've been an interesting guy to talk to."

She looked at the handwritten dates on the spines of the leather-bound journals. The dates for each corresponded with the pdf files. However, she noticed one volume labeled 14 April 1912. There was no pdf file on the thumb drive with this date. Tonya pulled the volume off the shelf and opened it. It was hollow and inside the compartment was a gold pocket watch with a gold chain and key attached. Tonya's legs felt weak. "Oh my God, I found it, this was too easy. God there's probably hidden cameras filming me right now." Tonya carefully removed the watch from the compartment and returned the volume to the shelf.

The watch was beautiful. It looked to be solid gold and had a beautiful design on the back and on the inside cuvette was inscribed the word "vita," which she knew was Latin for life. The watch key he described in his journal hung from a gold chain and at the end of the chain was a bob that looked like bone that had been carved into the shape of a skull. Fitting for a cursed watch she thought. She noticed the time on the watch. Of course, time of death could never be determined exactly but the watch had stopped at 9:00 p.m., which was in the range of when she had approximated the time of death. She put the watch in her jacket pocket, made sure she had returned everything to its proper place, locked the door and left.

The next day at work Jeff, her assistant commented that she looked tired. He knew she had another doctor's appointment so when she said she hadn't slept well he just assumed that was the reason and didn't press. She would volunteer more information

when she felt like it. Little did Jeff know that Tonya's sleepless night was because most of the night was spent holding the watch, studying it and researching its design on the internet.

All morning Tonya tried to concentrate on work. She had a lot to catch up, but it was hard to concentrate. The watch was in her computer bag and she could think of little else. She knew of a jeweler on Main Street; who specialized in antique and estate jewelry. She had gone there a couple of times looking for something unique for her mother for birthdays. He might be able to tell her something about the watch. She decided to go there during lunch.

"It certainly is an exquisite piece. Can I ask where you got it?"

"It's a family heirloom. It has been passed down for generations. Now it's mine and I just wondered how old it is.?"

"I can't give you an exact date, but I can tell you it is a Jean Antoine LePine. You can see his name here in white enamel under the cuvette which is very rare. He was the clockmaker to Louis XV and XVI as well as Napoleon I. It is solid gold, and in perfect condition. It is an amazing piece; I would guess it was made sometime during the reign of Louis XVI or perhaps Napoleon. How long did you say it has been in your family?"

"I actually don't know. I inherited it." The lies made her uncomfortable. What if Sean O'Brennen had brought the watch in here himself and the jeweler recognized it she thought. I could get arrested and lose my job. She tried to calm herself, she was just being paranoid, and she knew it.

"If you should ever decide to sell it, I know I could find multiple potential buyers."

“No. I don’t want to sell it. I couldn’t.”

“Oh, I understand. But should you ever reconsider.”

“Thank you. I appreciate your help.” She wrapped the watch in a cloth and put it in her jacket pocket then left. When she returned to her office, she expected to see police officers there to arrest her for stealing the watch. But only Jeff was there prepping the latest body to arrive. She went to her office and finished her paperwork from the previous day.

The drive home that evening seemed to take forever. It was raining again and cold. A glass of wine in front of the fireplace would feel good tonight. She parked in the driveway and entered her house. The air in the house was cold; she always turned down the heat before she left in the mornings. She turned on the gas logs and then went to her bedroom to change into sweats. While she changed, she looked at Sean O’Brennen’s pocket watch lying on her dresser. She had always trusted what she could see or test or deduce from experiments. Magic and curses were for parlor tricks and movies. She felt both stupid and desperate.

She put the watch in her pocket and went to the kitchen to pour a glass of wine. Then, wine in hand she settled onto the couch in front of the fire holding the watch in her other hand examining it, the key, the chain and the skull made from bone. She set the wine glass down on the table. Okay this is it she thought. She held the watch key tightly in the fingers of her right hand. She took a breath and then jabbed the key into the palm of her left. Pain shot through her hand and up her arm. Blood ran down the side of her hand and dripped from the end of the key. Was this enough blood she wondered? She touched the key to the cut on her hand picking up more blood. Then,

holding the watch in her bleeding left hand and the key in her right she slowly inserted it into the back of the watch and set the time, then using the key she wound the watch until she could make no more turns. She felt a sudden flash of warmth rush through her body. She felt lightheaded. She looked at the watch, the face for just a second seemed to glow red or was it her imagination. Then she looked at her left hand. The blood had begun to dry and the wound that she had inflicted on herself just moments before was gone.

Tonya rushed into her bathroom and rinsed the blood from her hand. It was gone; the wound was gone! She put her hand to her chest and felt her heart, it had a steady rhythm and as best she could tell it was in rhythm with the ticking of the watch. “Oh God, it's real, this is real!”

The next afternoon in her doctor's office they took blood and new tissue samples to biopsy. Sara Oldham commented that Tonya must be exercising because her resting heart rate had dropped since the last time she was in. The doctor gave words of encouragement but still tried to prepare Tonya for the worst.

A week later, half the staff at the morgue was out sick with the flu and Tonya was working long hours to try to keep up, but she felt good, she hadn't even had a sore throat. She was in her office preparing paperwork for the next autopsy when her cell phone rang. It was Doctor Oldham.

“Tonya, this is Sara Oldham, how are you feeling?”

“I'm good, how are you?”

“I'm good; you haven't caught the flu yet have you?”

“No, not yet but half my staff has it.”

“Well, the reason I’m calling today is that I have some very good news for you. All the tests came back negative, this biopsy showed no signs of a malignancy. I had the tests run twice just to make sure, but you are cancer-free. And your blood work is great cholesterol, iron, everything is perfect.”

“That’s great news. I was worried for a while, but I knew it would work out. It had to.”

“I want to see you back again in six months to make sure you don’t have a recurrence but until then just keep eating right and getting plenty of exercise and rest. And I will see you then.”

“Thank you. Thank you for calling.” Tonya leaned back in her desk chair and removed the pocket watch from the pocket of her slacks. She smiled as she gently wound the watch.

End