

**THE MARRIAGE
OF
SILENCE AND SIN**

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Jacki Lyon

The Marriage of Silence and Sin

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Summary: Two young professionals, Gale Knightly and Dicey Carmichael, are faced with the alleged suicide of a close friend, Elle Pandion. The two friends discover themselves while revealing the true cause of Elle's death.

For Michael, my *Rare Book*, and
Grace and Margo, my *Angels*

Prologue: A Private Conversation Between Best Friends

She dwells with Beauty— Beauty that must die . . .

– John Keats, “Ode on Melancholy”

As an immutable law of nature, all women scrutinize their own sex’s appearance, even that of their best friends.

“Now, I’m certain this is only a nightmare. Coral lipstick and beehived hair disappeared with white gloves and virgins,” whispered Dicey.

Gale nudged her best friend to stop the commentary, but she received only a nudge in return. “And her dress-- ivory chiffon with cotton candy sleeves. She looks like a damn cupcake.”

“Is your snark really necessary today? Show a little

restraint,” Gale pleaded.

“Show restraint? I’m showing tremendous restraint. What I’d like to do is drag her ass right out of there and give her a little dignity. She looks like a cheap wedding cake decoration. Why would Dr. Pandion allow her to look so horrific?” Dicey’s voice cracked with pain, and she wiped her nose with the edge of her sleeve.

“Here, take my tissue,” Gale offered, handing over the Kleenex. “You can’t be so critical. I’m sure some sweet, old lady dressed her and tried to coordinate her hair and makeup with the dress. Did you expect Dr. Pandion to say, ‘Straighten my daughter’s hair and apply a little rose lip gloss?’”

Dicey flashed irritable eyes at her friend. “Well, give me a comb, anyway. I’m going to, at least, fix her bangs.”

“Her father is right there,” Gale said, ignoring the request.

“He’s not looking.” Dicey rummaged through her purse

and pulled out a brush. She quickly combed down Elle's curled bangs and continued, "You know it's true, Gale. This whole situation is strange. Dr. Pandion is weird. He reminds me of a mortician I once dated who crept around like a spider. He had long, meticulous fingernails."

"Yuck. You never told me about him."

"A weak moment," Dicey admitted as she tucked the brush back in her purse. "But, he made my skin crawl just like Dr. Pandion. Look at him," she said, glancing in the direction of Elle's father, "even his fingernails sparkle."

"What does that matter?"

"Listen, this is no magic pumpkin taking her to Never Never Land," Dicey said as she touched the cold steel. "So, you tell me— why would a man, who is that meticulous, dress his twenty-three year old daughter in a meringue for her burial?"

"Please, watch your tongue. Someone may overhear you, and I don't want to offend her father, for God's sake."

Dicey pulled a pair of dice from her pocket and toyed with them between her fingers. Gale's piercing look said put them away. She disregarded the order and rattled the cubes so loudly that other mourners finally turned to identify the source of disruption. She stared back but quieted the cubes. Dicey's real name was Aster, but friends called her Dicey because she kept close a set of lucky dice that never rolled far from her pocket. Each cube was carved with pairs of alabaster and scarlet snake eyes. When Dicey faced a tough decision, she tossed the dice. It was curious how the red and white talisman seemed to always land on the right side of right. Whether or not Dicey followed their direction was a different issue.

"You need to get a hold of yourself, now!" snapped Gale under her breath.

"I'm sorry, honestly. It's my nerves. If I stop reacting and start thinking, I'm going to start crying. I only wish that I could have saved her. She's dead for Christ's sake!"

“I understand that, but you need to take a deep breath,” Gale said as she touched the edge of the coffin. “You couldn’t save her before. You can’t save her now. If someone really wants to die, they’re going to find a way to die. This isn’t about blame today.”

“But I should have paid more attention to the signs. I’ve seen them before, Gale. How could I blow it, again?”

“You didn’t. You can’t blame yourself nor can you castigate her father. That’s wrong. He just lost his daughter.”

“I’m sorry. I know that I’m a little out of hand.” She squeezed her eyes tightly and took a deep breath. “Man, this is tough.”

Gale picked at the edges of her purse strap as she stared at the young woman held in the satin folds of the casket. Elle’s typically straight blonde hair was teased around her petite head. Her face was different, too. With so much plastic surgery, she had morphed into a set of bulbous lips and protruding cheek

bones.

“I am sorry, too. I don’t understand why she killed herself. She went through so much pain to perfect her body, and then she overdoses. I don’t get it, but I never get why someone chooses to die when so many people are fighting to live.” Gale pulled her hand from the edge of the coffin to wipe a tear from her eye.

Dacey’s lips quivered in pain. “I just wish Dr. Pandion would bury her with more dignity. Forget the funky dress and hair. An open coffin with a suicide is macabre.”

“I agree with you, but it’s not fair to judge a parent when a child dies, especially like this.”

Silence and sadness filled the space between the two women as they stood together with their friend for the last time, wondering what forces brought about her fate. While Gale clung to her rosary beads for understanding, Dacey toyed with her set of dice. Pairs of blood-red snake eyes scored in her palm more

than once. Her stomach curdled. She turned from the coffin and went outside for some air.

Kneeling close to the casket, Gale made the Sign of the Cross and began to recite her prayers. *Hail Mary full of grace, Lord that is with thee, blessed art thou among women . . .* The petition was interrupted by a soft tap on her shoulder.

“Am I bothering your meditation?” asked Ken Tereus as he knelt beside her. His feral breath skimmed her cheek.

“No, not at all,” she said and stood up.

“How are you, Gale? It’s been a long time,” he said, looking up into her eyes.

“I’m fine, sad, but fine.”

“Life will eventually ease up. The ebb and flow of pain maintains our sanity,” he offered, rising next to her. “Traditional funeral ceremonies seem cultish to me, anyway. People prolong their own pain and suffering while the one who suffered most is pain free. A simple funeral pyre is my preference.”

Gale’s patience was waning. She wondered if it was the fear and awkwardness of death that made people say such awkward things. “Elle no longer looks like herself. The beauty is gone,” she finally said.

“I find it interesting when mourners comment on whether or not someone looks like themselves at their funeral,” Ken said. “The person is dead. Their spirit has been released. How could they possibly look like themselves? This isn’t how I prefer to remember Elle, anyway.”

“I suppose you’ve got a good point. When was the last time you saw her?”

“It has been almost a month. I’ve been out of the country.”

“Asia?”

“Yes. I acquired a stunning Quianlong rose vase to add to my collection. I’d love for you to see it sometime.”

“It sounds interesting, but if you’ll excuse me, I have to

be leaving soon and haven't spoken with Dr. Pandion."

Gale pushed her way through the band of mourners in search of Elle's father. She spotted the tall, slender man in a vestibule close to the mortuary. As she approached, Dr. Pandion's gaze floated above her head.

"Hello," he said quietly.

"Dr. Pandion, Gale Knightly. I don't know if you remember me, but I cared deeply for your daughter . . . I am sorry for your loss."

"Thank you." He turned and stared toward the casket and asked, "Doesn't Elizabeth look lovely today?"

"Lovely, Dr. Pandion . . . her dress is lovely."

"Her mother's wedding gown. Elizabeth adored wearing the dress for me."

Dacey found Gale in the restroom sitting in a chair with her head drooping between her knees.

"You look beat. And I am probably going to make your day even worse," Dacey said as she sat down next to her friend.

"Nothing gets much worse than a day like today, but tell me anyway," Gale said, raising her head.

"Guess who's here?"

"I already saw him."

"Don't tell me that you're going to go weak in the knees for him all over again."

"I never went weak in the knees for him in the first place, and I certainly don't have time for a man in my life right now?"

"I can't figure out what Ken Tereus does for women, including you."

"Beside the fact that he is gorgeous, rich and engaging, I'm really not sure what he does for women."

"He's pretty, not handsome," Dacey said, picking at her thumb nail.

"Whether he's pretty or handsome, I'm not interested."

I'm sitting in this chair because my feet are swollen and my back is killing me, nothing more."

"The lady doth protests too much," Dicey mumbled under her breath.

"Very funny," Gale said irritably. "Forget your own musings for one second and listen to me. I spoke to Dr. Pandion while you were outside," she said, lowering her voice. "He is an odd man, a very odd man."

"He's more than odd. The guy's bizarre," Dicey whispered.

"He told me that Elle is wearing her mother's wedding gown."

"That's strange, but now we know why she looks like a giant cotton ball," Dicey said as she toyed with her cubes.

"Yeah, she wore the gown for him-- often. He "adored" her in it."

"I've always told you that he was strange, something out

of "The House of Usher."

Gale raised an eyebrow with annoyance. "I don't remember ninth grade English."

"Edgar Allen Poe. And why are you being so testy with me? We're on the same side, remember?"

"Sorry, but like Poe or not, it still must be devastating to lose your child. I can't comprehend how people have the courage to take another breath of life after facing such a loss."

Chapter 1

Tyger, Tyger, burning bright,
In the forests of the night;
What immortal hand or eye,
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

--William Blake, "The Tyger"

Ken Tereus was immortalized among elite women approaching thirty and beyond. As a revered plastic surgeon, he molded perfectly firm, perfectly round buttocks to match perfectly pointed breasts. Women from Los Angeles to Milan made pilgrimages to his office to be transformed into goddesses.

Gale Knightly was a medical malpractice lawyer. She met Ken Tereus on a case involving the death of a young woman. Dr. Kerry, a seasoned ENT surgeon, penetrated brain tissue while

performing a standard rhinoplasty, and the thirty-one year old patient, who was a mother of two, bled to death on the steel surgical table. Dr. Tereus was an expert witness prepared to testify that the woman had an atypical facial structure and that this irregularity led to the puncture rather than negligence by Dr. Kerry.

Before hearing any testimony from Tereus, Gale caught wind of the guano, the night soil that doctors, lawyers and even plaintiffs use to mix and mutate facts to mold their case. Hank Daimon, Kerry's attorney, was trying to mix some magic crap to get Kerry off, but even Hank Daimon couldn't change these facts. Kerry blew the operation.

Dr. Kerry was a twenty-seven year veteran who had performed 8,126 nose jobs on people with distinct and distorted facial structures. White men, black women, teenagers, dwarfs, Amazons. You name it, he transformed them. In this case, however, the patient's face wasn't faulty; Dr. Kerry faulted. The

guy simply stepped out of the moment. The surgery was all on video. Dr. Kerry was describing his Sunday parachute jump with a half-interested surgical staff when he cut through the paper thin barrier separating sinus tissue from brain tissue.

Gale wanted to ask Dr. Kerry if he ever worried about the flight technician who packed his parachute before Sunday jumps. Did the tech always check for sharp edges that could rip through the thin material, separating him from life and death? Just like his patient depended upon Dr. Kerry to stay in the moment, did he rely on someone else to stay in the moment as he drifted through the heavens, dangling from the silky thin mushroom?

It was nine-forty a.m. The deposition was scheduled for ten. Gale always made it a point to arrive first for meetings. Selecting her seat was important. If the conference table was long and rectangular, she sat in the center, facing the door. If the table was square or circular, she sat on the right side facing the door—always prepared for those who walked in or out of her life.

While Gale reviewed a yellow legal pad indexed with color-coded Post-it notes and measured script, Dr. Tereus arrived. The man didn't walk into the room. He moved into the room, quietly, deliberately. Gale watched him as if he was forcing her to acknowledge each muscle flexing beneath the pin-striped suit tailored to his body. His hair was a rich auburn with a few gray streaks. A thick piece of red fell onto his brow as he placed a mahogany briefcase on the conference table directly across from her. His body blocked the exit. She slowly stood and extended her hand.

“Gale Knightly.” She looked into his eyes. Piercing gold irises glistened back.

“Dr. Tereus.” He grasped her hand with a firm grip. Pulling away, Gale slowly sat down, fingering the pale notebook to steady her thoughts.

“Are you a misanthrope or a redeemer?” he questioned.

Gale was forced to look back into his eyes and said, “I

beg your pardon?”

“A misanthrope, someone who hates all mankind or—,”

Dr. Tereus began, but Gale interrupted.

“I know the definition of misanthrope, doctor. I don’t get your point.”

“Are you plaintiff or defense?”

“It all depends,” she said.

“You are a plaintiff’s lawyer, then?”

“No, I’m not this time, but not always. Our firm is unusual. We do a few plaintiff cases a year but mostly defense litigation.”

“Who do you represent?”

“Dr. Robins, the resident present in the surgical suite. She’ll be released from the case before it goes to trial.”

“A confident lawyer.”

“I am confident, but this has nothing to do with my expertise. It’s a no-brainer. Dr. Robins was only observing the

surgery, not assisting. Jeff Moscovitz is the kind of lawyer who likes to sue everybody.”

Gale’s heart rate eased as the conversation continued. “I believe you’ve been an expert for Hank Daimon several times. Is that true?”

“Sure, I love him. He’s a ringmaster in the courtroom. He knows how to put on a show for the jury like no other defense lawyer I’ve ever seen. He’s the best.”

Gale hated working on cases with Hank Daimon. He was unilateral. Right or wrong, Daimon defended doctors and only doctors. His attitude toward plaintiffs spilled out like bleach, blotting out any color of empathy for the plaintiff. Gale struggled over his myopic approach to malpractice. Doctors were a part of the human race, too, just like lawyers and hairdressers and teachers. Some were dedicated miracle workers, some were negligent, but some, though rarely, were undeniably deviant. In this case, Dr. Kerry was negligent.

Daimon arrived at exactly ten. He was attractive in a classic 1950's kind of way with broad shoulders and thick gray hair that swept back from his forehead. Gale was disgusted when skimpy court reporters oozed from their chairs as he walked into the courtroom. Glancing at Tereus, she blushed at her own reaction to the doctor.

“How are you, Gale? I’m surprised your doctor’s still in the trenches on this one,” Hank Daimon said and plunked down his double-wide briefcase.

“They’ll release her soon. I don’t think Dr. Robins is even a flicker on their greed meter. It’s all Kerry. But Hank, when are you going to settle? That video is pretty incriminating.”

“Gale,” he drawled, “you know everyone has a right to be defended, even doctors. Now, as I’ve asked before, are we high paid mediators or are we high performing litigators?”

“But this one is on video tape, Hank. Dr. Kerry’s cognitive process was jumping from a plane when he penetrated

Darlene Johnson’s brain, not focusing on reconstructing a nasal passage.”

“Gale, listen, if every surgery was videotaped, we’d hear about golf strokes, football scores or some doc’s latest piece of poontang. They listen to Bach as well as Bon Jovi. That’s how surgeons operate. Just because the guy was telling a goddamn story about a parachute, it doesn’t make him negligent. Now, I want to get this deposition going, unless your client wants to pay for the court reporter’s time,” he said snapping his files on the table.

Gale fumed as she listened to Daimon’s questions drone on. Did he have to redress her in front of Dr. Tereus? She was a lawyer, too. He carried an extra fifteen or twenty years but respect was respect, and he had no right to embarrass her. But that was it, he had embarrassed her. Why was she bothered by his typically acrid behavior today? Daimon talks to everyone like that, and people learn to ignore it.

After the deposition, Gale quickly declined an invitation to lunch with Daimon and Tereus. She'd rather peel back her fingernails than eat a sandwich sitting across from Hank Daimon.