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THE
CABINET
OF
DR. LENG

A PENDERGAST NOVEL

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DOUGLAS PRESTON &
LINCOLN CHILD



GRAND
CENTRAL

New York Boston

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GRAND
CENTRAL

DOCTOR LENG WILL SEE YOU NOW...

1

THE MORNING SUN, FILTERED through a veil of dust and smoke, fell feebly upon the intersection where Broadway crossed Seventh Avenue. The thoroughfare was made of dirt, its potholed surface packed so hard from an infinitude of horses and wagons it seemed as impermeable as cement, except in the muddy areas surrounding the grooves of the cable car tracks and the hitching posts, sunk in manure.

The intersection was called Longacre. It was the center of the carriage trade, an outlying district of the rapidly growing city where horses were stabled and buggy makers toiled.

On this particular chilly morning, Longacre and the avenues and streets leading from it were quiet save for the occasional pedestrian or horse cart passing by, and nobody paid much attention to the young woman with short dark hair, dressed in a purple gown of an unusual cut and fabric, who stepped out from an alleyway and looked around, squinting and wrinkling her nose.

Constance Greene paused, letting the initial flood of sensations sink in, careful not to betray any sign of the upswell of emotions that threatened to overwhelm her. The sights, noises, and odors unexpectedly brought back a thousand memories of her childhood, memories so distant that she scarcely knew she still retained them.

The smell of the city hit her first and most viscerally: a mixture of earth, sweat, horse dung, coal smoke, urine, leather, fried meat, and the ammoniac tang of lye. Next were sights she'd once taken for granted but now looked strange—the telegraph poles, invariably listing; the gaslights on various corners; the numerous carriages, parked upon or next to sidewalks; the ubiquitous shabbiness. Everything spoke of a city growing so fast it could scarcely keep up with itself. Most strangely, the white-noise susurrus of modern Manhattan was missing: the growl of car traffic; the honking of taxis; the hum of compressors, turbines, HVAC systems; the underground rumble of subway trains. In its place was a relative quiet: hoofbeats of horses, shouts, calls, and laughter; the occasional crack of a whip; and, from a nearby saloon, the tinny, off-key strains of an upright piano. She had grown so used to seeing the boulevards of Manhattan as vertical steel canyons it was hard to process this scene, where the tallest buildings, as far as the eye could see, were no greater than three or four stories.

After a few minutes, Constance took a deep breath. Then she turned south.

She walked past a frowzy restaurant offering a choice of oxtail goulash, potted veal chop, or pigs' feet with kraut for five cents. Outside stood a busy newsboy with an armful of papers, his clear piping voice announcing the headlines of the day. She passed slowly, staring, as he held one out hopefully. She shook her head and walked on, but not before noting the date: Tuesday, November 27, 1880.

November 1880. Her sister, Mary, nineteen years old, was currently being worked half to death in the Five Points House of

Industry. And her brother, Joseph, twelve, would be completing his sentence on Blackwell's Island.

And a certain doctor had recently begun his ghastly, murderous experiments.

She felt her heart quicken at the thought of them still alive. She might yet be in time.

Reaching into the smock of her dress, she felt the reassuring heft of her antique stiletto, along with eight hundred and fifty dollars in period money. She went on at a brisker pace, heading in the direction of Herald Square and a better part of town.

A dozen blocks to the south, she found a couturier that, in addition to tailored dresses, also sold prêt-à-porter outfits. An hour later she emerged, with a shop's assistant holding a hatbox and two large bags in tow. Instead of the purple gown, Constance was now wearing an elegant bustle dress of peacock-blue silk and white ruffles, with a matching bonnet and heavy Eton jacket. As she walked briskly to the curb, the gazes she attracted were admiring rather than curious. Constance waited while the assistant flagged a hansom cab.

The driver began to get down from his seat, but Constance opened the door herself and—putting a high-buttoned shoe on the running board—sprang up easily into the compartment.

The driver raised his eyebrows, then mounted his seat as the shop assistant put the bags and the hatbox inside the cab. "Where to, ma'am?" he asked as he drew in the reins.

"The Fifth Avenue Hotel," Constance said, proffering a dollar bill.

"Yes, *ma'am*," the driver said as he pocketed it. Without another word, he urged his horse forward, and in moments the cab had

merged smoothly into the ebb and flow of the noonday traffic.

It was another dozen blocks to her destination: the opulent palace of marble and brick, six stories high, that occupied the entire block of Fifth Avenue across from Madison Square. The cab came to a stop at the hotel's entrance portico. "Whoa, Rascal," the driver said.

Constance opened the small trap door in the rear of the roof. "Would you wait for me, please?" she asked.

He glanced down from his sprung seat behind and above the compartment. "Certainly, mum." He released the door lever and she stepped out. Immediately, two doormen rushed forward to take possession of the bags and hatbox. Not pausing to wait, Constance walked swiftly beneath the rows of Corinthian columns and across the white-and-crimson marble flooring of the entrance hall.

Past a barber shop, telegraph office, and restaurant, she found the large front desk of carved wood, polished to a brilliant hue. Behind the desk were several men, dressed in similar livery. One of them approached her.

"Are you looking for the ladies' reception room, madam?" he asked deferentially. "You will find it one flight up."

Constance shook her head. "I would like to take a room, please."

The man raised his eyebrows. "For you and your husband?"

"I'm traveling alone."

The eyebrows went back down discreetly. "I see. I'm afraid, madam, that almost all of our standard rooms are taken—"

"A suite, then," Constance said.

The central lobby of the hotel was a large space with a high, vaulted ceiling, and the constant procession of chattering guests,

their footfalls echoing on the diamond-patterned marble, made it difficult for her to hear.

“Very good, madam.” The man turned to a row of niches built into the wall behind him, withdrew a leatherbound book from one, and opened it. “We have two suites available on the fourth floor, and several on the second, if you are not inclined to use the perpendicular railway.”

“The what?”

“The perpendicular railway. It has intersections on each story of the hotel.”

He was, Constance realized, talking about the elevator. “Very well. The second floor will be fine.”

“Would you care for a view of—”

“Just give me the best available, if you’d be so kind.” Constance felt like screaming. *November 27*. Now that she knew she was in time to save her sister, every minute spent on such trivialities seemed an age.

The hotel manager was too well trained to remark on her impatience. He turned over a heavy leaf in the ledger, dipped a pen into a nearby inkwell. “Very good, madam. There is an excellent corner suite available, complete with parlor, chamber, dressing room, and bath.” He raised the pen. “The rate is six dollars per night, or thirty dollars for the week. How long will you be with us?”

“A week.”

“Maids?”

“I’m sorry?”

“Your maids? How many are traveling with you, madam?”

“None. Two.”

“Two. Very good. We can accommodate them in the servants’ quarters. With meals, of course?”

Constance, fidgeting, nodded.

“May I have your name?”

“Mary Ulcisor,” she said after the briefest of pauses.

He scribbled in the ledger. “That will amount to thirty-five dollars and fifty cents.”

She handed him four ten-dollar bills. Turning, she saw two porters waiting patiently behind with her modest shop bags.

“Will you have those taken up to my suite?” she asked the manager as he returned her change. “I’ll follow later...along, ah, with my maids.”

“Of course.”

Constance gave each of the porters a quarter, and the manager a dollar. His eyes widened in surprise and he took it gratefully. She left the lobby and returned to the entrance, pausing just long enough at the literary depot to pick up a street guide to Manhattan.

She found her driver and hansom cab waiting outside the portico in the dust and noise of the avenue. As Constance approached, she took a closer look at the man. He was perhaps in his mid-forties and heavysset, but his build was muscular rather than stocky. His cold-weather uniform was clean and his manners were good, but something about the square cut of his jaw and crooked bridge of his nose told her he knew how to take care of himself.

She walked up to his seat. “Would you be interested in making some more money?”

“Always ready for business, mum.” He had more than a trace of an Irish accent—County Cork, she guessed; something else that

would be useful.

“I need transportation downtown.”

“How far downtown, mum?”

She opened the street guide she had just purchased, located an intersection, and showed it to him.

“Lor’, mum,” he said. “Sure, there must be some mistake.”

“No mistake. I’m going to pick up someone and bring her back here.”

The cabbie had an expression on his face somewhere between bewilderment and apprehension. “It’s no place for a lady down there, mum.”

“That’s why I need somebody who knows how to handle himself. And who’s equipped with—” she mentally dug into her knowledge of Gaelic— “*liathróidí cruach*.”

The man opened his mouth in surprise, but he remained silent when she reached into her purse, took out two five-dollar bills, and held them out to him—making no effort to hide her stiletto in the process. “There’s another ten waiting when you bring us back here safely.”

He whistled. “Not afraid of the sight of blood, then?”

“Not after breakfast.”

“Well, I’ll be...” He laughed as he took the money. “Climb aboard, then. Willy Murphy never ran from anything in his life.” He winked at her a trifle saucily. “If I’m headed for the hereafter, missus, I’d rather they found me with a tenner in me pocket.”

“If that’s indeed where you’re headed,” Constance replied as one of the doormen helped her into the cab, “I’ll keep you company on the journey.”

The cabbie laughed again; shook his head in disbelief; pulled the lever to close the carriage door; then raised his whip, cracking the air above Rascal's head, and they went trotting off.

2

AS THE COACH MADE its way down Broadway, Constance sat back in the small compartment. The leather of the seat was worn and cracked, and with every jolt she could feel the lumpy springs of the cushion dig into her.

She estimated she'd arrived about two and a half hours ago. That would make it early afternoon. Good: where they were going, the earlier in the day, the less dangerous it might be.

She had made it safely to this time and place. In half an hour, maybe less, she'd be reunited with Mary and spiriting her away from a miserable existence of overwork and ultimate death. At the thought of death, Constance became aware of her pounding heart. She almost couldn't process all that had happened in the last twenty-four hours—and if she allowed herself to dwell on it, the thoughts would quickly overwhelm her. She had to concentrate on one thing only: rescuing her sister. As the coach made a brief jog along Fourteenth Street before heading southeast once more, she closed her eyes and, with long practice, let the sounds and sensations around her grow dim, purging herself of all unnecessary thoughts. When she opened her eyes again, the cab had just crossed East Houston Street, and Fourth Avenue had become the Bowery. Putting two fingers to her wrist, she felt her pulse: sixty-four.

That would suffice.

Now once again she let in the external world. The landscape had changed dramatically from the upscale neighborhood of the Fifth Avenue Hotel. Here there were more wagons than cabs, with battered wheels and goods covered in stained oilcloths. The pedestrians that thronged both sidewalk and street wore vests and jackets of coarser material. There were few women visible. Every man, no matter how disheveled, wore some kind of hat or cap. The broad pavers of Fifth Avenue had given way to cobblestones.

She felt the cab begin to slow. A moment later, there was a rap on the door in the compartment's roof.

She reached up and opened it. "Yes?"

The head of Murphy, the cabbie, appeared above the trap door. He had pulled the flaps of his cap down around his ears. "Begging your pardon, missus, but I'd rather not be taking her directly through the Points."

"Of course. Please pull over a moment."

While the cab waited, she consulted the city map she'd purchased. "I would suggest turning west on Canal, then south on Center."

"And then...left on Worth?"

"Exactly. Can you manage it?"

"I'll pull in at the corner."

"Very good. And Mr. Murphy?"

"Yes, mum?"

"If there's any trouble, you don't need to return us to the hotel. Union Square will do. I would not want you getting involved in

anything that might cause...difficulties for yourself. I just need to get my friend safely away from that place.”

“Begging your pardon, mum, but if she’s confined in the workhouse, there must be a reason.”

“She had the bad luck to be out after dark and was swept up in a raid by police looking for streetwalkers.”

“They may not be in a bloody great rush to release her.” It seemed the closer he came to becoming a partner in crime, the more familiar—or at least pragmatic—the coachman became.

“I’ll persuade them the same way I persuaded you. Two raps when we arrive, please.” And Constance closed the trap door.

As the cab started up and she sat back once again, Constance knew her voice had been steady. However, inside she felt anything but calm. With each clop of its hooves, the nag was bringing her deeper into her own distant memory. And as their surroundings grew increasingly dirty and impoverished, Constance was assaulted by smells she’d long forgotten: the scent of penny pies and sheep’s trotters and steamed oysters; the odor of printer’s dye being readied for inking the next day’s broadsides; acrid coal smoke. And the sounds: the call of the street vendors shouting “Buy! What’ll you buy?”; the singing of children playing hopscotch or skipping long rope, blithely ignorant of their poverty:

Johnny gave me cherries,

Johnny gave me pears.

Johnny gave me sixpence

To kiss him on the stairs.

And then—as the cab turned down Center toward Worth—came another change, for the worse. Constance felt as if she had just parted the forbidden veil of Isis and passed into the unnatural world beyond. The air now grew thick with greasy fumes from the illegal tanneries that infested the area. The singing of children, the cries of merchants, vanished. As a premature dusk descended from the thickening atmosphere, Constance began to make out new sounds: whimpers of despair and pain; grunts and curses; the cackling and screeching of streetwalkers; the sickening sound of brickbats hitting flesh. These, too, came back as memories, but memories she had long suppressed.

The carriage turned a corner, then came to a lurching stop. Two raps, and the trap door opened slightly. “Let me just put the blinders on Rascal, mum,” said Murphy, his voice tight.

Constance readied herself, sliding one hand into the pocket that contained both money and stiletto. A moment later, there was a rattling sound, then the door to the carriage opened and Murphy extended one hand to help her out. In the other hand he held a long wooden cudgel, with a spine of metal, that he had partially drawn out of one coat pocket.

“No fears, mum,” he said. “It’s just me ugly stick.” But his attempt at a lighthearted tone failed, and his eyes were constantly in motion. Constance noted his posture was that of a man ready to repel a threat at a moment’s notice. No doubt he was wishing he’d stayed uptown. But it was just as obvious that, having escorted a lady to such a place, he would not abandon her.

With this thought, Constance moved forward one step, another—and then, raising her eyes to look ahead, stopped with an involuntary

gasp.