

# Chapter One

## 1. A Moonlit Rose

Glenn Falls was dead quiet at three ten in the morning, except for the noise emanating from the Slaughterhouse where local butchers were working the graveyard shift. Into the wee hours the barn-like building teemed with bloody activity: the grinding, chopping, and shredding of beef. The sound level was loud to the workers inside, but to all those safely asleep in their homes or to the few citizens who roamed the streets at this late hour, only a low, scratchy drone emerged from the roof ridge atop the abattoir, through the two cracked-open windows that served as ventilation. The nightly river fog that rolled in amplified the eeriness, and the air held an unmistakable chill—enough to inspire goose bumps.

At the Chateau Erotique, a maison de tolerance which had been a quaint inn before the city had fallen into chaos, Rose was getting paid by the madame for the erotic services she had provided to a disgusting slob named Jim. Rose did not find her 'reward' for allowing the malodorous man to have his filthy way with her at all adequate. She needed more money. Although having already pocketed three times her rent so far this evening, greed still coursed through her veins. More cash meant more purchases, and more pretty things meant more happiness.

Rose was exiting the building when she spotted a solution to her craving.

He was standing directly across the street, calm and motionless in his tall brimmed hat and black frockcoat. She knew that a gentleman dressed this handsomely was rarely out in the small hours of the night unless he had the Chateau on his mind. The gentleman seemed an easy mark for a whore of high caliber like Rose. She imagined that an angry

wife somewhere might have tossed him out for transgressions unknown. Feeling like she was already on a financial roll, the prostitute went and pressed her chances one more time. She waved at him like a schoolgirl.

“Hello there, handsome sir!”

The gentleman seemed to be focused on a mutt across the street and paid no heed, so she pranced in a seductive way directly into his line of sight and tried again, using her most sultry voice.

“Evening, sir! Fancy some company?”

“Ah. Hello there. And what is your name?” the man inquired of the drunken whore obstructing his view.

“That'd be Rose.”

One of his favorite names, the man thought, much as the rose was his favorite flower. Simply hearing the name Rose brought back childhood memories of his mother in her rose garden. He inhaled a deep wiff of the putrid air from the abattoir; it filled his head with the scent of roses. “Tis a pretty name for such a pretty flower.”

“Oo, why thank you, sir.” Rose had heard similar compliments many times, yet she was impressed by his genuine tone.

“Pity though.”

“Pity, sir? Why pity?” she wondered, caught off-guard by his word choice.

“It’s so unfortunate that you will soon be plucked. You won’t see another morning light, nor catch the glint of dew from the retreating fog as the dawn breaks.”

As the stately gentleman finished this omen, he unsheathed a long, shiny knife from the inside pocket of his jacket and sliced the rose from his own lapel.

Slow to react, Rose took one wobbly step backward.

The man leaned forward an inch and whispered, “Scared are we? We should be, because tonight I am going to kill you. Ah, but where’s the fun if I did not give you a fleeting chance? We should play hide and seek. How about I count to ten first, and then I’ll come and find you. One...”

Rose was confused. She was having a lot of second thoughts. Her easy money grab was turning into a loon! Was he joking? Rose disbelieved for a couple more drunken seconds, looking around hesitantly but staying put. His curious tone of voice was captivating and left her waiting for a punchline.

The man covered his eyes with his left forearm. “Three, four, five...”

*Oh my God! He really means it!* she thought. Fearing that he was indeed insane, Rose turned and bolted toward a side street, but her eyesight had become as fogged as the air around her, mostly from having imbibed her evening's pay back at the inn. Her ability to see was further clouded by the tears that were welling up from the stinging cold air and from fear. They made her blink and start guessing instead of seeing her way, so she quickly found herself stumbling.

The loon yelled after her: “Nine ... Ten! Apple, peaches, pumpkin pie, if you're not ready, holler aye!” He began his pursuit, knife upraised.

Beneath his frockcoat and bristling black mustache the pursuer was truly a villain, thick and bold. He was taller than the average gent of the time, and in the top hat his silhouette stood six-foot five. Long-legged strides made his height seem even more formidable. If his villainy were not batty enough, his expression was not remotely serious or appropriate: he wore the dreamy stare and big smile of a child who has just discovered a secret stash of biscuits.

Rose began throwing discarded wooden crates and tipping over barrels behind her in an attempt to block the fiend's path. This only succeeded in slowing Rose down, while the man managed to sidestep each obstacle with apparent ease and a grin of glee. All her world was sinking into those dark staring eyes that never blinked, even when she hurled a glass bottle at his face. The man just calmly leaned to one side, and the bottle whizzed past his top hat, missing only by inches.

She darted into an alley. Its three wall lanterns were spaced far apart from each other: two to her right, while the left side lamp sputtered dimly. Passing under its illuminated pool and glancing backward, her eyes caught for one frozen moment the

long blade of his swinging butcher knife, reflected back at her when it caught the light just so, as if signaling someone—but of course there was no one to signal, thus nobody to defend her. Perhaps the villain was signaling Miss Poe herself, warning her that her short life was already up, that her last filthy days of whoring and drinking had lapsed, and that the game was over.

Rose's hands were now scuffed, her clothing tattered. She had worn a pretty dark blue dress in which to solicit, of a hue much like tonight's urban sky. Over the dress, her coal gray petticoat and faded blue shawl, slightly untied, were all she had for warmth against the chill. Her dark brown hair seemed slightly darker now from stumbling through a few puddles. Clumps of dirt and trash were clinging to her clothes and collecting in her hair, adding to her unprecedented grungey look.

She tripped hard over a set of fruit crates. Grasping for the brick wall and gasping for breath, she glanced backward. The man's smile only widened. Sweeping box after box out of his way, he easily cleared away all the debris that had made Rose stumble.

Suddenly the man's delirious grin vanished. For the first time since he had started his evil game, the earnest hunter spoke, and when his voice emerged it was bestial and gruff, nothing like that of the eloquent, flower-appreciating gentleman at the Chateau.

“Interrupt me? Interrupt my private thoughts?” he spat. “How dare you, you stupid slut! I did warn you to run. I gave you a fighting chance, but you stood there gaping like a dolt instead of spitting in my face and taking off!” The rage that had been building up inside the madman for reasons unknown to the naïve Miss Rose was now burning its way outward. He had become a fire dragon, and his intent was clearly murder.

Rose rounded a corner to the right, arriving out in the open again. The Rainbow River was to her left, the abattoir to her right. For the desperate girl, this moment was her last chance to reach the humming sound, in hopes that one of the meat workers would see her or hear her cries for help.

“Leave me alone, please leave me alone!” she sobbed. To every two steps she took, her assailant took one loping stride, steadily closing the distance between them. The

panicked girl grew too terrified to scream. Up the alley toward West 22<sup>nd</sup> Street she ran just as fast as her stubby little legs would take her. Flashes from their conversation a few minutes prior tore through her head like lightning shredding the sky. As she compulsively glanced back in her drunken state at her pursuer, she repeatedly lost her balance, tumbled to the street, then recovered only to stumble again.

How could she have found herself in such a predicament? Why did she have to push her luck so? Despair about her terrible error of judgment rendered her mute—perhaps for the first time in her chatty life. And why had she not run for her life the instant he had told her? The tiny nag buried deep inside her inebriated mind kept repeating these questions.

The lantern above the main door of the slaughterhouse was one final beacon of hope. The main doors were closed, of course, but there was a chance they were unlocked. Rose had another two hundred yards to reach them. She poured it on!

The killer, however, lunged forward and managed to grasp the tattered shawl on her right shoulder. His fist tore off a swath of it with an ugly ripping sound.

Rose regained her voice at last. She wailed desperately, “Please, somebody, anybody! Help! A loonie wants to kill me! Please, someone!” Yet both prey and predator could tell that not one of the meat workers was on a cigarette break outside. No one would hear her cries.

The villain paused in his pursuit. Staring at the handful of cloth, he brought it to his nose, inhaling the smell of his quarry like a bloodhound at a fox hunt. Rose staggered twenty more feet but the man, now reassured by this aromatic sign from providence, caught up with her once more. With a carnivorous grin he pounced like a puma onto his prey, tackling her at the corner of the slaughterhouse grounds.

The side of her head crashed down onto the cobblestones. Her jaw smashed into the ground so hard that two of her teeth dislodged and rolled out of her mouth as she exhaled. Her left temple struck a large pebble imbedded in the road, causing her immense pain. She was rendered semi-conscious. Her head pain was excruciating, her

jaw was likely broken, and her neck reeled from whiplash as well. Rose's injuries were so severe that she yearned only to black out the rest of the way.

Steam vented from their mouths as from two industrial machines. Her malicious predator, however, had only just begun his performance. He planted his right knee victoriously between her shoulder blades, pinning her heaving chest onto the cold, wet pavers and crushing the wind out of Rose's lungs, leaving her only shallow gasps. Her hands clawed at the damp, slippery cobblestones; her fingers searched in vain for purchase, and indeed she dug so hard that the fingernail on her right index finger snapped in half.

She writhed on the ground as best she could, but a half minute into the agonizing struggle and still unable to get any real oxygen, Rose Poe began to give up. She was exhausted. Her crying ceased. The wells in her eyes had dried up. Like a hooked fish hauled out of the water, she was now utterly at the mercy of her captor. She tried to speak, but the pained, raspy whisper could barely be heard, even by her.

“Please, please, sir, don't kill me!”

Rose continued to plead for her life, but the sounds were more inside her mind than outside. She was passing out. Her eyelids began fluttering, but the lids stayed closed a little longer with each blink. Peace was almost within view.

The moment the man saw her eyes close and remain shut, the villain yanked her head up hard by the hair. “Don't fall asleep on me, Rose.”

Her eyelids fell open enough to examine his knife, up close and personal. It was so close to her nose that she could make out the reflection of her ruined face in the shiny blade.

Her tormentor ran the point of the blade over her face with slow care, like a plastic surgeon planning his cuts. The man traced across her forehead, down her right temple, and down her cheek.

At each slight pressure of the blade Rose tried not to wince. She couldn't hear the slaughterhouse drone. She couldn't even feel pain anymore. The only sounds left were

the delicate scratch of the blade against her lips, and a cruel voice taunting her in her final moments.

“Scared, aren’t you?” he seethed. “You should be. Hm. But wait. Wasn’t there something I’m forgetting to do?” He leaned in close: “Rose, my delicate flower!” Rose’s eyes began to flutter again, trilling as the beast whispered so gently and seductively into her ear.

Then, into her left ear he added, “Your nightmare is over. You can go free now! Be free!”

This one final drop of hope entered the ear canal of Miss Rose Poe like an anesthetic. She closed her eyes again amid a flood of relief, knowing that she was free to go.

Satisfied that she believed him, he hauled her hair upward and backward, lifting her mangled face up off the cobblestones, and exposing her pale neck. In one quick, masterful motion his blade hacked through the neck, ripping flesh, cutting veins and arteries, and slicing poor Miss Rose Poe open from ear to ear.

The prostitute knew she was long past her last breath of air. Her blood flowed smoothly between the cobblestones. A few droplets eventually worked their way into the Rainbow River by following the same channels that the rain used when taking its leave of the streets. Rose's fingers remained as wide open as her surprised eyes. Her body stiffened and soon grew cold in the chill of this, the thirty first night of August, 1878.