

CHAPTER 7

FRIDAY, JUNE 8, 1867, SHIPPEN HOUSE, PHILADELPHIA, PA

Jane Gray's father, Dr. William Shippen, was always meant to become a physician. His grandfather had served as chief surgeon for General Washington's Continental Army, and his father co-founded the medical school at the University of Pennsylvania. Like his forefathers, Dr. Shippen was considered a pioneer in his methods, bucking opposition from other doctors who, in his mind, caused needless suffering and death. He was fascinated by chemistry and its application to curing disease, and shared his passion with his children. Jane had always been particularly inspired by her father. When the telegram arrived informing her of his passing, she was deeply affected. The trip with Ned and Mary Louise to Philadelphia for his wake and funeral felt dreadful.

Midway through her father's wake, Jane disappeared into the laboratory and operating theatre where she and her sister Emma had spent so much time with him. Dr. Shippen had wanted his firstborn to be a son, but instead gained twin daughters with curious minds much like his own. Jane looked out across the burners and beakers, reminiscing.

"Do you remember the day he showed us how to make invisible ink?" Emma asked.

"As I recall, the first time you tried to decode a message, the paper caught fire in the flame," Jane laughed.

“And all those dissections?” Emma shook her head. “Frogs, I could tolerate. But feral cats?” She made a face.

“You were always so squeamish.”

“Not you, sister,” Emma said. “What about the time you dissolved one of Mother’s gold rings? The look on Pa’s face!”

“He was so angry.” Jane remembered.

“Yes,” Emma said. “But proud, also. How clever you always were.”

Jane started when the door behind her jerked open.

“Jane Gray,” Hank said as he walked into the lab. “What are you doing in here?”

“I’ll take my leave now,” Emma said with a scornful look in Hank’s direction, and disappeared.

“I could ask you the same,” Jane said, moving her gaze to Hank.

“I had forgotten that your brother Edwin is a temperance proponent. Can’t find a drop of liquor in the house. So I figured that perhaps the good doctor might have kept a stash in here. You know”—Hank chuckled—“for medicinal purposes.”

“I think the absence of alcohol has less to do with Teddy and the temperance movement than with Mother. Father wouldn’t allow a drop of the stuff around her after her first visit to the asylum. But he also knew that Mother would never step foot in his operating theatre or the lab. She used to say there were too many ghosts out here.”

Jane moved to the far end of the room. She reached under a counter and pulled out a corked bottle of clear amber liquid. “For medicinal purposes.”

“God love him,” Hank said as Jane handed him the bottle. He pulled the cork and swirled the contents before smelling them. “Scotch. Fine and aged at that.”

“Much like my father,” Jane said.

“In honor of your father.” Hank lifted the bottle in the air in a toast and took a drink. He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and offered the bottle to Jane. She shook her head.

“God, how I hate wakes,” Hank said, and he took another drink.

“I don’t think anyone enjoys them.”

“Other than the dearly departed, you are most certainly correct.”

“You believe that the dead take pleasure in the grief of their family and friends?”

"I think they know nothing of it," Hank said. "My theory is that they are in the glory of heaven, having a few drinks with the Father during their wake here on earth."

"I pray your theory is correct," Jane said, her gaze drifting to the laboratory apron that hung on a hook by the back door. "I just wish I had come to see him during his illness."

"I thought you went to Philadelphia after your visit with us."

"That was my plan, but Ned decided that I needed to come home to be with Mary Louise."

"Ned refused to allow you to visit your father when he was dying?" Hank set the bottle down on the counter.

"He felt Mary Louise needed me more."

Hank placed a hand on Jane's shoulder. "I'm sorry. My brother had no right."

But he's your husband. That's what her father would say when she discussed Ned's behavior with him. *They are Whartons, after all.* Even though her father had forced her into a marriage she had never wanted, she never held it against him. *Father knows what's best.* God, how she was going to miss him.

"Are you all right?" Hank asked. Jane lifted her gaze, her eyes catching his. The empathy in his face melted the dike that, up until now, had held her emotions at bay.

"Oh, Janie," Hank said, and wrapped his arms around her as Jane began to cry.

"I loved him so," she sobbed, clinging to him. "I should have come to him."

"I'm certain your father realized your constraint. He knew how you cared for him. And you will always be his favorite."

Jane looked up at him, her eyes questioning and brimming with tears.

"Of course you were your father's favored child," he said. "You were smartest of all the Shippen girls. Smarter than Emma. And probably smarter than the boys. Except maybe for Edwin. When my old man informed me that you were to be my bride, I was intimidated as hell. It's a man's greatest fear. Having a wife more intelligent than he." He lifted her chin. "Especially one so pretty."

A blush rose on her cheeks, and she looked away. Hank was

humoring her, for Jane knew how she looked. Pale hair. Pallid skin. Plain Jane Gray. She reached into a pocket of her skirts for a handkerchief to dry her eyes.

"Here. Allow me." Hank took the square from his breast pocket and dabbed her tears. "There," he said, his hand lingering at the side of her face.

"Is it stifling in here, or is it just me?" she said with a snuffle and stepped from him.

"'Tis rather warm with all the windows closed." Hank moved his head in the direction of the side door that led to the back lawn and carriage house. "Come outside with me. Help me imbibe a little of your father's medicine." Grabbing her hand, he urged her toward the door. "Come, Jane Gray. A little fresh air will do you good."

"Fine," she said with a sigh.

Hank picked up the bottle with his free hand and pulled Jane along with him to the garden. They found a bench under an old crab apple tree and sat. Hank offered Jane the bottle. She lifted it to her lips, tilted her head, and let the liquor pour into her mouth. The taste was earthy and musty, and burned all the way down.

"Easy there, sailor," Hank said and took the bottle from her. "I said a little. Not half the damned bottle."

Jane brought her hand to her mouth, choking.

"It smells like my father."

"Sounds like your father enjoyed his medicine more than just occasionally." Hank chuckled and threw back a mouthful before handing the bottle to Jane again.

Jane brought it to her nose and inhaled deeply. The smell of the whiskey and the scent of her father were nearly indistinguishable in her olfactory memory. She smiled.

"I remember finding him out here under this old tree just before supper. Sometimes with stacks of papers, or a medical journal, or the latest literature from England. And sometimes, he would just be here with no papers at all. Just sitting with his eyes closed and thinking. 'Cogitating,' he would say when I would ask what he was doing." Jane took another drink from the bottle and handed it back to Hank.

"'Cogitating,' eh?" Hank said, then took another swig. "The world

today could use a healthy dose of that. All we seem to do today is cajole, coerce, and condemn.”

“My father said that President Lincoln was the mind of the Union. That he had thought through each decision he’d made long before the idea was ever proposed. That he was the logic in an illogical world. And without his steady mind to control the body of the country, the nation would flail about like a madman until exhaustion set in. His fear was that, without Lincoln’s wisdom to guide us, we would destroy ourselves before we tired out.”

“A wise man, your father.” Hank offered Jane the bottle again.

“I wish I could have been like him,” she said after taking another mouthful. Her eyes began to water. Jane was unsure if it was from the burn of the whiskey or the breaking of her heart.

Hank turned to her, his arm behind her on the back of the bench. “How so?”

Jane cradled the bottle in both hands and looked into the amber liquid. “His strength. His confidence and conviction. The freedom to do what he loved and say what he wanted without retribution. His passion for science and healing others, even when it meant breaking rules and risking all that he had worked for.”

“You’re talking about grave-robbing?”

“Technically, he didn’t rob graves.”

“Just because he wasn’t the one doing the digging doesn’t mean he wasn’t responsible.” Hank took the bottle from her and helped himself to another drink.

“If it is as you say after death, the souls of those who were taken from their graves knew nothing of it. They were in the glory of God,” Jane said, and took the bottle back. She lifted it to her lips and gulped down another mouthful. Her toes were tingling, and a great warmth rose within her.

“Go easy, Janie,” Hank cautioned and put his hand over the one that held the bottle. “I do not wish to have to explain to your brothers or my wife why I am carrying you into the house.”

“I am perfectly capable of carrying myself.”

With the bottle still in her grasp, Jane stood from the bench to demonstrate. As she did, the back lawn seemed to swoosh around her,

and she stumbled. Hank jumped to his feet, catching her and the bottle before they both fell to the ground.

“I think that’s enough medicine for you, lassie.”

Jane’s head was spinning and her legs felt heavy. She held on to Hank to keep from falling.

“Oh my,” she said with a giggle. “I think you might be right.”

“Nothing like a little stroll to walk it off. We can slip out the gate behind the carriage house. A couple of blocks and a cup of strong coffee, and no one will be the wiser.”

Hank tucked the bottle in the inner pocket of his jacket and wrapped his arm around Jane’s waist to steady her. She clung to him as he led her down the path toward the carriage house. She laid her head against him, closing her eyes to stop the spinning.

“We’ll have you as good as new in no time,” he said.

With that, Jane broke from his embrace, running not more than a few steps before bending over. Hank was right behind her, holding her as she threw up her father’s scotch on the ground. When she finished retching, Hank handed her his handkerchief. She wiped her mouth and started to cry.

“Janie,” Hank said, sympathy in his tone. When she tried to speak, her tongue was thick, her words stuck somewhere between her mind and her mouth, which contributed further to her distress. She saw two of everything, and she still felt nauseated. Between the whiskey, Mary Louise’s illness, and the loss of her father, it was all too much. As her cries turned to sobs, Hank lifted her in his arms and carried her to the house.

Jane didn’t remember much after that. A commotion in the parlor. Hank’s voice. Ned’s anger. The smell of the room she and her sister Emma had shared when they were girls. Her brother Teddy’s soothing words. A prick on her arm followed by a rush of warmth and darkness.

“Oh, Jane.” Jane could hear Emma talking. “You’ve really done it this time.”

Jane lifted her head, feeling terrible. Emma was next to her on the side of the bed, her pale eyes staring at Jane’s. Looking at her sister was like looking in the mirror.

“It wasn’t intentional,” Jane said over the pounding in her skull.

“When you left me in the laboratory with Hank, he asked about Father’s whiskey, and I wasn’t paying attention to how much—”

“You don’t think clearly when you are around Hank,” Emma interrupted.

“It’s not like that anymore,” Jane said. “I’ve moved on from the past.”

“It’s me you are talking to, sister.” Emma narrowed her eyes.

Jane grew silent. Emma knew Jane’s heart better than Jane did.

“I’m not certain I remember what happened today,” Jane said at last, feeling ashamed.

“You had been gone for the longest time. When Hank brought you into the house, you were babbling incoherently and sobbing uncontrollably. Hank told Teddy that you were having some sort of breakdown. That’s when they brought you upstairs, and Teddy gave you a tranquilizer.”

“Why would Hank say such a thing? I didn’t have a breakdown. He got me drunk.”

“Which is precisely why he lied.”

Jane brought her hand to her temple. Her head was throbbing. How could she explain her behavior without implicating Hank?

“Are you feeling all right?” Emma asked.

“I’ll be fine,” Jane said. She looked at Emma. “What’s Ned going to do?”

“He’s conferring with our brothers about sending you away.”

The sickness churning in Jane’s stomach intensified at the thought. “Do you think . . . ?” she asked, the bile rising in her throat.

Emma shook her head. “I doubt Ned will have you committed again, because you are serving a useful purpose at present.”

“A useful purpose?”

“What you do best. Taking care of people. And Ned needs you to do that for Mary Louise until he marries her off and collects on whatever deal he made with the general.”

“Why do you think he chose Daniel Ketchum?” Jane asked. “The Ketchums aren’t wealthy. What could the general have offered him?”

“What does Ned want most of all?” Emma asked.

“For other men to take notice.”

“Exactly. My guess is the general offered him some important position in the War Department. So be mindful, sister. I don’t trust Ned’s motives one bit. In fact, I don’t trust either of the Wharton brothers. They use everyone around them—their associates, their friends, their families. And especially their wives. You and I both know that, had Ned had a choice, he would have let you rot in that asylum the last time.”

“That was mostly Teddy’s doing,” Jane reminded her.

“True,” Emma said, “but as your husband, Ned made the final decision. And had it not been for Mary Louise making life so difficult for him while you were away, and Papa’s petition to the doctors at the institution, Ned would have kept you there. Now with Papa gone, there’s no one to protect you. Once Mary Louise is married, Ned will use the slightest incident to lock you away forever.”

Jane squeezed her eyes tight as the gravity of Emma’s words sank in. She rolled toward the wall, sick to her stomach, head pounding, and not wanting to think about it anymore. She soon drifted off into a dream of a world long ago when she was young. Scenes of her father flashed through her mind like flipping through the chapters of a book. When she woke, night had fallen, the sky outside the window inky and dark.

“Emma?” Jane called. The room was quiet. Emma had gone. Jane glanced around to gather her bearings and sat up, swinging her feet off the bed and onto the floor. The movement made her dizzy and queasy. Once her head stopped spinning, she stood and slowly navigated her way to the door. Resting one hand on the frame to steady herself, she took the knob in the other, turned it, and pushed it to open. The door wouldn’t budge.

They’ve locked you in.

The air became suddenly hot, the room’s walls seemingly moving toward her. A stifling oppression fell over the room, and Jane had difficulty finding her breath. She pounded on the door, calling for her sister.

“Emma!” she cried. “Please unlock the door. Emma? Teddy? Anyone, please!” Jane gasped for air. “Please help me!” She heard footsteps in the hall, getting closer. “Please open the door!”

A key clattered in the lock and the knob turned. As the door

opened, dim light streamed from the hall. Her brother Teddy stood in the doorway.

"Oh, Teddy," she cried and fell against him.

"It's all right," he said, and held her. "Just take a deep breath."

"I need to get out of here. Please take me outside for a breath of fresh air."

"You need to rest," he said. "I'll give you a little something to help you sleep."

"No!" Jane was beginning to protest when Ned, wearing a night-shirt, appeared in the hall outside the door. The intensity in his black stare bore through her. Jane swallowed down her fear and the bitter taste of bile rising in her throat and allowed Teddy to lead her back to the bed. As she sat on its edge, he pulled a small case from his pocket. She watched him open the lid and remove a vial and a silver needle.

"I don't need a sedative, Teddy. Just some air. Can you at least open the window?" she asked as Teddy filled the syringe and took her hand in his.

"It's not safe for the window to be open," he said. He outstretched her forearm and pushed the needle into the vein at the crook in her elbow. When he pressed the plunger, Jane felt the burn of the bromide salt as it entered her body.

"Emma says that you and Ned think I'm crazy," Jane said, her thoughts clouding.

Teddy glanced at Ned before looking back at Jane.

"You need to stop such talk, Janie," Teddy said in a hushed voice as Jane felt the effect of the drug overtaking her.

"I'm not insane," Jane insisted. "Hank made me drink Father's scotch with him. It was the whiskey, Teddy, not my mind."

"Is that what *Emma* told you to say?" Ned snapped from his stance in the doorway, his voice sarcastic and angry.

"No. It's the truth," Jane said, slurring the words.

"Back to bed," Teddy said as he lifted Jane's legs and moved the bed linens over her. "All will be better in the morning."

"Don't let him send me away again, Teddy. Please," Jane said, her lids heavy.

"Just get some rest," Jane heard Teddy say as the room dimmed, and he and Ned faded into the shadows.