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MYSTERIOUS TALES OF THE UNEXPLAINED

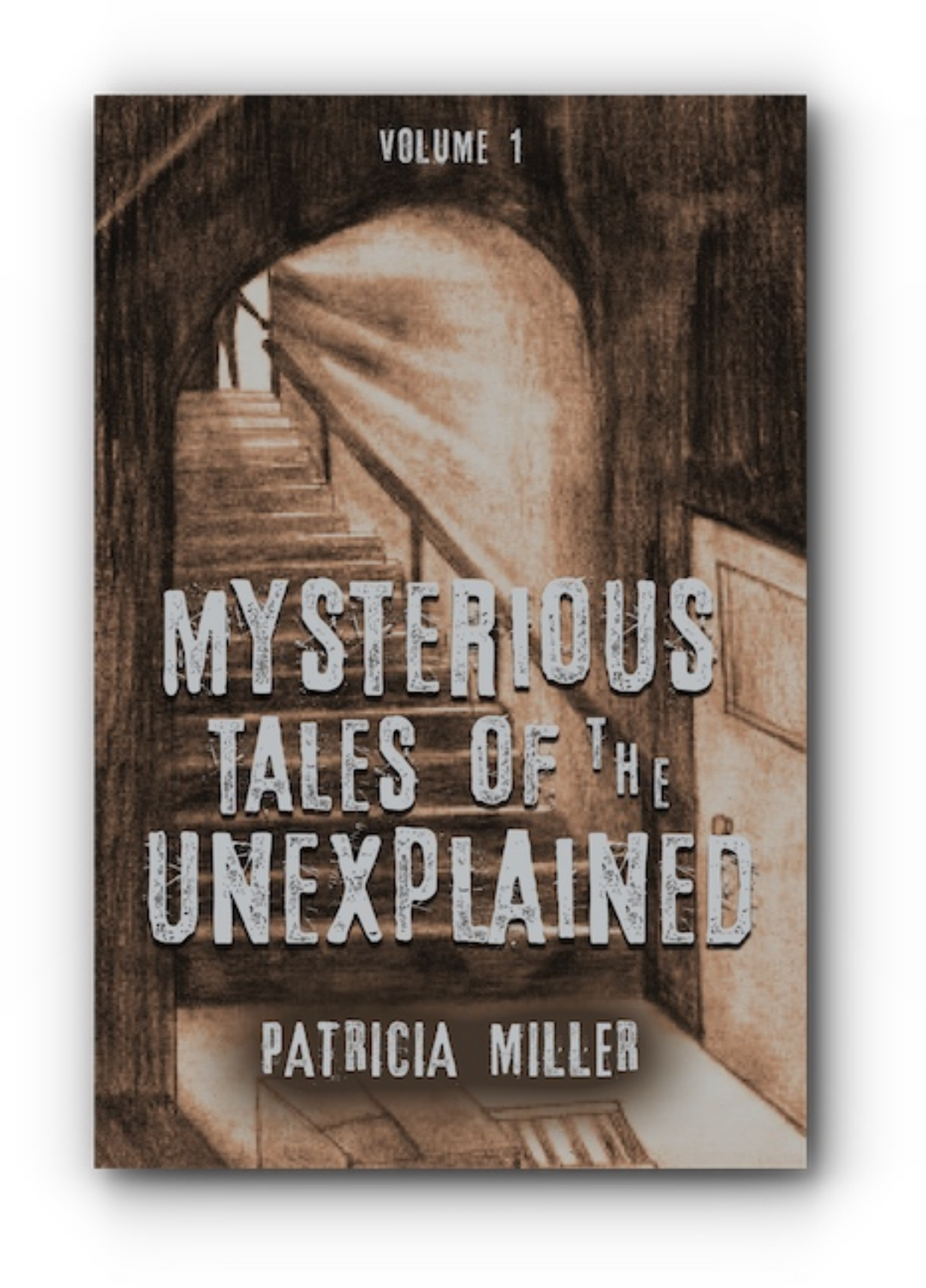
VOLUME I

by Patricia Miller

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VOLUME 1

**MYSTERIOUS
TALES OF THE
UNEXPLAINED**

PATRICIA MILLER

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DRAMA QUEENS AND KINGS

“Do you have the copies for the hotel?” asked Mr. Bates. Despite the stacks of papers and files upon her desk, Kelsie knew exactly where they were.

“Right here, Mr. Bates,” she said while handing him the documents. With a smile, her boss went back to his office.

The owner of Bates’ Architecture could always rest easy knowing his assistant/secretary was on the job. Not really given the exact title of assistant, Kelsie Raymond performed her duties with the confidence of someone much older. She didn’t need the title. It was somehow just understood between them. The other secretaries had been hired after her but Mr. Bates knew that Kelsie was a catch.

Maybe someday he would promote her officially. But for now, it worked for this sandy-haired, twenty one year-old.

To know Kelsie is to be both intrigued and annoyed with Kelsie. I would know best. I'm Max. I guess you would call me Kelsie's boyfriend. You see, our relationship has been what one might call 'on and off.' Not that we argued because we didn't. It was more because of lack of time.

This story I am about to share, is a great example of how Kelsie would find herself in the middle of strange happenings. She finally gave me permission to write it all down and tell it.

Looking back, it was a very important point in both our relationship and in Kelsie's life in general. It was at this time that she found her true calling. She became a sort of undercover, go-to person. Even today, years later, this small town is still buzzing with the story of when Kelsie Raymond used to live here. And I have the good fortune of being able to tell it with cool insights I didn't realize I had at the time. So, on with the tale.

Kels, as her friends would call her, proceeded to neatly organize papers into files, and files into cabinets, on this typical Tuesday afternoon. Everything was ready for tomorrow's workday by the time the clock struck five. With the usual exchange of "Goodnight" and "Have a nice evening," Kelsie happily began to make her way to her car.

Although it was such a beautiful, little town, some people couldn't understand why anyone would want to live in Ohio. The winters could be long and harsh but the spring and summer were beautiful. Rural, with rolling hills, Brighton was a great example of Ohio at its best. Pear trees, lining the main road on either side, led to town buildings, the police station, and a pretty, little church. A simple town, neat and clean with friendly, helpful neighbors.

Maybe all the neighbors weren't so friendly, thought Kelsie as she spotted and attempted to avoid an older lady, barreling down the sidewalk towards her.

Kelsie turned her head in the opposite direction to try to get passed unobserved. She didn't succeed.

“Oh Kelsie dear, so good to see you.” As usual Mrs. Crenshaw’s victim was caught in a web of questions and interrogations. She began with the stability of her job, went to her mother’s health, and ended with a quick “my you are very thin dear.” Kelsie’s mind flipped from one thought to another, trying to come up with anything that would help her get away quickly.

Viola Crenshaw had a notorious reputation in Brighton. She was known for being very frustrating. Her appearance was rather neat. Her hair, always swept up in what one would call an up-do. She always wore glasses that looked to be too big for her face, constantly slipping down the bridge of her nose. Although she seemed friendly, everyone dreaded the sight of one of her floral dresses approaching them.

If it weren’t for her uncontrollable need to talk, she might be liked. Unfortunately, getting away from her was difficult and people were in such a hurry these days. No time to stand and talk. For some reason, it never occurred to Mrs. Crenshaw that the person with whom she was talking,

did have a place they needed to be. Maybe, that was because she didn't.

“And what about the murdered man they found just outside of town? Just outside of our lovely little town,” she asserted a little louder. “How horrible.” She sputtered her words with disgust.

Feeling stuck in the nosey gossip's grip, Kelsie quickly made a firm and forceful move. “I would love to stay and talk to you, but I have to get home. My mother expects me.” And with this, she turned and completed her journey to her car, feeling rather pleased with her handling of Mrs. Crenshaw this time. But, would the old woman be deterred in the future? Kelsie figured not.

Once in her car and the door shut, she looked up. Quickly glancing at Mrs. Crenshaw walking away, she couldn't quite put her finger on it, but there was something about her, something pretty. Was it her up-do, or maybe her walk? Whatever it was, Kelsie didn't want her to catch her looking.

With her seatbelt latched, Kelsie pulled out of the parking place and started for home. She caught a glimpse of the theatre flyer she had laid on the passenger seat earlier that day. Each year, her employer sponsors a local theatrical event and highly encouraged his staff to participate. If she decided to join the stage crew again this year, it would certainly cut into her time with me. Because of Kelsie's incredible appetite for strange happenings, I didn't get as much time with her as I would have liked. I wasn't mad about it. I knew she liked me but she would always get involved in things.

She told me she could take or leave the theatre. But, with her boss being a major contributor, she was certain to disappoint him if she'd opt out. Young, energetic, and rather clever, she needed to be involved. It was just her nature and I couldn't hold her down. So, I decided it was the best idea to savor every moment I got with her.

Kelsie's blue eyes gleamed as she finally thought of a way to balance both her interests and her time with me. She

was convinced this was a beautifully, perfect idea. My response seemed to come as a surprise to her.

“What? Are you suggesting I join the stage crew? Oh Kels, no! You know that drama stuff isn’t for me,” I cried.

Kelsie would not be deterred, not in the least. This had been the best idea she had ever had and she wasn’t about to give up. “Drama stuff? It’s not like you would be on stage. You know you would like working with the props and backdrops,” she said. Our conversation went back and forth.

“Max, last year I did something you really wanted me to do. Seven times actually. I really had no interest in them at all.”

“Seven? Where do you get that number?” I asked.

“Two football games, one car show, one gun show, two festivals featuring motorcycles, and one double-header. That one was worst of all!”

“How do you remember numbers and amounts exactly?” I asked, astonished. “That is so annoying.”

“Oh, please! Let’s do this *together*,” she pleaded. That was the clincher. The magic word; *together*. That got me and she knew it. How could I refuse?

ROPING ME IN

Later that same evening, Kelsie and her parents were seated around an abundantly filled dinner table. Mrs. Raymond was known for her excellent cooking and I always enjoyed every meal. Kelsie's father had been fortunate in his employment. Now, a top manager at one of the area's most successful corporations, he still liked to spend as much time as possible with his family.

"You really are hungry tonight," her mother said to Kelsie. "Sometimes I just don't know where you put it." Kelsie, a petite girl, was also glad that her figure did not reflect the size of her appetite. It was true. Kelsie could really put the food away. Having been an athlete in high school, she now jogged as often as she could. "Kelsie," her mother continued, "I saw Mr. Bates at the hardware store.

Sounds like he's really pleased with your work at the office. I'm really proud of you."

"Thanks mom," Kelsie said with a little pink on her face. "I'm lucky you two were friends or I wouldn't have known about the opening as soon as I did." A slight grin on her mother's face was in reaction to Kelsie's unending humbleness. Would she ever learn to take credit for her successes?

"I might have recommended you, but Mr. Bates wouldn't have you around just because you're my daughter. You have earned that job." Kelsie didn't look up at her.

"I guess you're right, but it doesn't hurt to know people," she added. As usual, she made her food vanish easily and quickly. "Well, got to go. I'm meeting Max tonight. We're going to sign up for the stage crew at the theatre." She whirled around from the table to the desk to grab her keys, then to the chair to grab her jacket. She bounced from one place to another like a pinball bouncing repeatedly, searching for its final and intended destination. In a snap she was gone.

As the door closed, Mrs. Raymond shot a weary glance at her husband. “Max? Stage crew?”

“I came along with you to the bookstore when were young. But it wasn’t the books that I was interested in,” Mr. Raymond said with a grin. Her mother sipped her coffee and stared fondly at him sitting next to her at the table.

Kelsie told me that she often thought about how fortunate she was to live in such a beautiful town but the truth was, I felt lucky. She had been offered another job last year in Wayland, a larger town just west of Brighton. But she decided to stay close to home for now. Someday, I knew she would leave Brighton. But for now, this is where she belonged.

I remember her entering the drug store that day. She walked past the clerks, the gum, and chocolates. She passed the cosmetics and over the counter remedies to the pharmacy, where she smiled directly at me.

“Hi, Max. Busy?” Kelsie asked.

“No. I’m just about done.” I was happy to see her. Even if it meant getting caught up in some stupid theatre thing. We left the drugstore and headed to my car.

As I drove, we were chatting about the theatre when suddenly Kelsie’s attention turned toward the sidewalk. A familiar sight caught our attention.

“That’s Jake. He’s coming from baseball practice,” said Kelsie. But, he wasn’t walking toward home. Kelsie knew that on Tuesdays her brother stayed after school for batting practice and then usually went to a friend’s house for supper. I pulled the car up to the curb to meet Jake, who was walking with his friend, Peter. I quickly agreed to give them a ride to Peter’s house.

The two jumped quickly into the backseat, after throwing each of their bat bags in the rear. Jake, 14 years of age, was the third of the Raymond children. Rebecca was between Kelsie and Jake. Rebecca, who was 19 years old, was currently away at college. Surprisingly enough, Kelsie and Jake got along well considering their seven-year age difference. I was very thankful that it was a quick drive, so I

could avoid questions about our intended destination. For I knew that Jake was sure to relentlessly tease me about the play if he knew.

After dropping the two teens off, we arrived at the theatre. Pulling up I couldn't help but be surprised at the large number of vehicles in the parking lot. *Maybe people do this after all*, I thought. Kelsie, observing the look on my face, could tell that I wasn't feeling quite as badly as I had first anticipated. She shared that she knew people that came from many surrounding counties to be involved in the theatre. She was trying to put me at ease. She succeeded, as usual.

“This will be fun,” Kelsie said. I still wasn't so sure.

THE THEATRE

The inside of the theatre was dark to our sight when we first entered but soon our eyes adjusted. The building's interior was impressive with plush carpeting and fancy fabric drapery on every entrance way. The lobby was filled with people which slightly edged up my nerves. But, being familiar with the process, Kels led me to the sign-up table.

On our way, she spotted several people she knew. "Oh, Susan's back," Kelsie said with a less than positive tone.

"What's wrong with her? She seems friendly enough." Susan was all smiles, twittering around.

“You’ll understand soon enough, Max. She’s an actress and she *is* pretty good. The only problem with her is that she believes she’s better than anyone else could *ever* be,” Kelsie insisted. I wondered if there wasn’t a bit of jealousy mixed in with Kelsie’s opinion of Susan. I knew my girlfriend had excellent judgment of character in most cases. Alright, let’s face it. It was usually most of the time, but Susan *was* pretty. Actually, a better word to describe Susan would be glamorous, with her shiny, blonde hair and her obviously whitened teeth.

“And that’s Phillip over there.” Kelsie pointed in an opposite direction. “I’ve mentioned him to you. He’s had a good role for the last two years, and he’s improving every year. He’s a good guy too.”

Why did I feel an uncomfortable twinge after hearing the last part of that statement? Just what did she mean by Phillip being a good guy? Looking around at the guys here, made me feel glad I decided to let her talk me into this. Let’s face it, good guys like Philip could mean trouble.

Kelsie filled in blanks about him owning and running the restaurant on Main Street; the one that was famous for the best pizza subs in town. I knew of the place, but always had food delivered instead of going in. Phillip looked to be in his mid-twenties and Kels said he had inherited the restaurant after the death of an uncle.

Signing up was easy and we left the stage crew table with schedules of meetings and rehearsals. A little fellow with a theatre nametag pinned to his shirt approached us and instructed us all to be seated in the auditorium, as the director was about to make an announcement. We found seats.

A tall, thin man, about thirty-five I would say, walked onto the stage. He was dressed in black and he had bushy and wavy hair that was sandy brown. I think the lights on the stage made his outline blurry against the hazy background. His manner was laid back as he addressed the group.

“Hello. If you are new to our theatre, welcome. I am Richard Felton, the director. I’m glad to see so many people

interested this year. We have a very exciting play to present, and we have a lot of work ahead of us,” he said with a smile. “We’ll all be seeing a lot of each other in the next few months leading up to our production. Let me remind each and every one of you, that we are here because we love the theatre, but we also need to remember that the theatre is a serious business. We have several residents and businesses who contribute and donate to keep this theatre afloat. We must remember that this theatre has enjoyed a very respectable reputation for many years. We want to see to it that our good reputation continues by producing quality performances. If you have any questions, my assistant Ryan, myself or the individual crew leaders will be happy to help you.” The director pointed to a small guy at the bottom of the stage steps standing and holding a clip board in his hands. Kelsie leaned over and whispered.

“Richard is an excellent director. But, he’s never had an assistant before,” she said as we gazed at him. “He must be new in town. Have you ever seen him around?”

“Nope. He doesn’t look familiar to me,” I answered.

Glad to have the sign-up process over, I was looking forward to spending some time alone with Kelsie. We walked hand-in-hand through the local park and decided to rest on a bench, located in front of a fountain. I knew she was talking about the play and the stage crew, as I caught bits and pieces of phrases, but I was more interested in her eyes. Yep, I'm a sap.

WHISPERS IN THE HALLWAYS

Days passed and finally the weekend was here. It was on this bright Saturday that the first stage crew meeting was scheduled. At eleven in the morning I found myself at the theatre with Kelsie, sitting among about fifteen people. Last year's stage crew manager was front and center. His name was Leo.

“OK. Hello. I'm passing out the list of assignments we, as a group, will be responsible for. This years' play was written by an English student who is a senior at our own Brighton High. It's very odd for the director to consider a play from one of his students but I am sure, as we get going,

you will all realize why he made an exception. I see a couple of new faces. Kelsie, who did you bring with you?”

“This is Max,” she said.

“Welcome. And I believe Mary is our other new face?” Further back a hand raised. “We welcome you also. I want you all to begin looking over the assignments and maybe it would be a good idea for our newcomers to get a tour around backstage. I’ll show you around, Mary.”

“And I’ll take care of Max,” Kelsie quickly added.

“Good. Some of our last year’s props can be altered and used for this year’s play but some will have to be built. As usual, you will find my email address and my cell at the bottom of the handout. Feel free to send me any ideas you have and we will meet back here on Tuesday evening at seven o’clock to discuss the specific plans.”

The brief meeting adjourned, Kelsie took me backstage. The grand tour included the makeup and costume areas. Explanations of stage procedures were discussed before finally making our way to the prop room.

The stairway leading down felt creepier than a dungeon. Guess I've never been in a dungeon but this was exactly as I imagined it would be. There was a noticeable drop in temperature.

At the bottom of the steps, Kelsie opened a door, leading into an interesting room. I was immediately overwhelmed with the packed full and overloaded room. We made our way in different directions, looking through the boxes and bins.

“What a collection of crazy things,” I murmured. Kelsie replied only with a faint laugh.

Moving into the far corner, Kelsie saw a box labeled telephones. I caught up with her and just as she peeked into the box, she heard muffled voices and realized they were coming from the other side of the wall. As we moved toward the voices, we soon realized the wall was actually a locked door barricaded with shelves and boxes. The door obviously hadn't been used in a long time as I could see tons of dirt and dust on the floor around it and cobwebs

covering the threshold. Again, the voices penetrated the barrier.

“Susan, how can you say that?” said the male voice.

“That sounds like Phillip,” whispered Kelsie.

“Easily, it’s the truth. You’re just not good enough to act opposite me yet. My friend is better than you and he’s sure to get the part. So, just accept it and take a part that is more suited for you.”

“Ouch,” I whispered to Kelsie. “That can’t be good for the morale.”

“Shhh,” Kelsie said to me.

“You think what you like, but he won’t get that part easily if I can do anything about it,” Phillip continued. Kelsie smiled as if she was proud of Phillip for not backing down.

“You tell her, Phillip,” she whispered. The voices ceased and we heard footsteps that sounded more and more faint, heading away from us.

“What was that all about?” I asked.

“Just typical theatre bickering,” she answered without looking up.

We made our way out of the dark catacombs and began to climb the stairs. “This might be more interesting than I thought,” I said while grinning at Kels.

She grinned back. “We can come back later to look at the props,” said Kelsie. “Let’s go look at the rest of the theatre.”

Once at the top of the stairs, a thought occurred to me and I questioned Kels. “Wait a minute. How come we didn’t run into Susan and Phillip in the hallway if they were down there?”

“I’m not sure how they got in there. The basement must be sectioned off. Sometime, it would be fun to explore and find all the hallways,” Kelsie snickered.

VIOLA WHO?

Thankfully, Monday was not as busy at work for Kelsie as it had been last week. This allowed everyone to catch up on some work. By afternoon, everyone was relaxed and less concerned with paperwork. Office chit chat began. Mr. Bates overheard Kelsie discussing the play and her decision to help out with the stage crew again. Kelsie thinks this pleases him. Memories of past productions were shared and just like anything else having to do with the theatre, Kelsie was engrossed.

Kelsie's mind was more like a sponge than anyone I ever knew. She liked learning. Not just academically, she liked learning about all things. There wasn't much Kelsie

forgot. Mr. Bates seemed to know an awful lot about the actors and actresses too. He mentioned Phillip's improvements last year.

"He really is quite good." Mr. Bates was a true believer in will and determination. She must have decided then that it would do Phillip some good to know what Mr. Bates said, especially with Susan trying to intimidate him. Kelsie's ears pricked up when she heard him mention the name Crenshaw.

"Excuse me, Mr. Bates," Kelsie interjected. "Did you say Crenshaw?"

"You bet I did. One of the best actresses this town's ever seen," Mr. Bates answered. As he spoke he raised his face to the ceiling as if to find the words he would choose up there. "Why, I remember going to the theatre when I was a kid. I loved it when my parents would take me there. And, in my opinion, the best show I ever saw there was when Viola Crenshaw appeared for the first time. She seemed just like the actors and actresses in the movies."

“Wait a minute. Are you talking about Old Lady Crenshaw?” she questioned. It was like Kelsie couldn’t believe her ears. Could it really be the same person?

“One and the same. Does that surprise you, Kelsie?”

“Well, I guess it does. She just doesn’t seem like that at all. She seems to be sort of a...” Kelsie stopped herself.

“Sort of a what?” Mr. Bates grinned. He wasn’t as surprised as he was pretending to be. He knew Mrs. Crenshaw was misunderstood by many of the townspeople.

“I must not really know her like I thought I did. She seems to show up out of nowhere, and holds me up when I’m in a hurry to get somewhere and asks a lot of questions.” Kelsie tried to gently explain as others began to listen to their conversations.

“I know what you are trying to say, Kelsie,” Mr. Bates reassured. “People don’t really understand who she is and who she used to be before she became older. Viola Crenshaw is somewhat of a genius in her own way.” Mr.

Bates was kind but Kelsie still believed he was stretching things a little with Mrs. Crenshaw though.

“A genius?” Kelsie would have chosen other adjectives to describe her but never the word genius. But inaccurate information was unacceptable to Kelsie. “Tell me more of what you mean, Mr. Bates.”

Her boss was only happy to go into great detail in telling her about what he had learned from his parents. How Viola Crenshaw was a successful student but that in her day it wasn't common for women to go for additional training beyond high school. He explained how she talks a lot because she knows so much, but that people seemed to avoid her and she has very little people to talk to.

“They seem to see her as annoying. If people would just take the time to listen to her every once in a while, they would learn a lot, and probably like her too.”

This made Kelsie feel bad for that was exactly how she did see her. That is, perhaps until now. And I heard all

about it too. She told me he just might have a point worth considering.

Kelsie was surprised to hear a coworker by the name of Tom mention the theatre to Mr. Bates. Tom hadn't been with the company long and for some reason, Kelsie didn't feel comfortable around him. She told me about that too. She said that she didn't have a shred of evidence to back up her feeling. Tom had dark hair that always looked messy, and he stood tall with a stocky build. After hearing what Mr. Bates had said about Viola Crenshaw, she started to question her judgment of others and decided that she would try to avoid making hasty judgments.

“Are you joining the theatre, Tom,” Kelsie asked him.

“Yeah, I think so.” Kelsie thought that she heard some hesitation in the tone of his answer. She told me that she couldn't explain it but that she knew there had to be more than what he offered. Again, this was in support of her eerie feeling around him.

“I didn’t know you were interested in the arts.” Kelsie tried to gently press without sounding rude, especially not knowing this guy much. He evaded her glance and she knew this wasn’t usually a good sign. Avoidance of eye contact could mean a lot of things. He then made an excuse of needing to make more copies. Kelsie chalked it all up to shyness and didn’t push any further.

Home was peaceful that night. Kelsie sat with her legs crossed on her bed and allowed her mind to drift. Thoughts of her conversations with Mr. Bates about Mrs. Crenshaw ate at her conscience. She thought out loud.

“Most of my friends avoid her. I’ve even caught mom avoiding her in the grocery store.” The blare of the phone brought her out of her thoughts. I was calling.

“Hi, Kelsie, What are you doing?”

“Nothing much. Just thinking. Hey Max, you know Old Lady Crenshaw?”

“Yeah. What about her?”

“Well, today at work Mr. Bates was talking about past theatre productions and you won’t believe what he said. Are you ready for this? He said that she used to be a really talented actress who performed in the community theatre.”

“You have got to be kidding me?”

“I feel so bad. I’ve always seen her as a pesky, pushy, and annoying old lady. He said she’s pretty smart. He called her a genius.”

“A genius? You might want to check the office water cooler. There has to be something in it harder than water,” I joked.

“I’m serious, Max.”

“OK. Maybe she is smart and maybe she used to be a good actress, but that doesn’t change the way she is now.”

“Well, she can be annoying and she does act like everyone should have all the time in the world to just drop everything and stand around and talk.”

Our conversation ended, she popped into bed. She spoke to herself.

“Genius or no genius, she can still be a pest.”

THE PROOF

A couple of weeks passed. Day after day at the theatre, Kelsie, me, and the rest of the stage crew worked at transforming the empty stage with colorful backdrops for scenery. For outdoor scenes we built small buildings, painted on roads, and flower gardens. For indoor scenes we put together walls for a kitchen and living room and put chairs and furniture in front to see where they would look best. The girls changed around most of what we guys thought looked good. And if I was an admitting person, I would admit they did look better.

Secretly, I began to like the theatre more and more. What began as something I was talked into became a

hobby. I enjoyed the work and seeing it all come together. But most of all, I liked the friendships. My circle of friends was growing and it was cool. Now, I was understanding how Kelsie was able to be so immersed with her work at the theatre.

Leo, the stage crew manager, proved to be a clever and zany guy. He was always making us laugh. He was respectful and patient but at the same time, hard-working and made sure things got done. I think we all worked hard for him because of how nice he was. The best part was that he was able to take a joke instead of always dishing them out. This stage crew stuff was hard work but everyone seemed to like what they were doing and that is what counts.

The director's assistant, Ryan, paid us visits from time to time. He mainly checked on our progress. He was very concerned with everything staying on schedule. Kelsie said Richard, the director, used to pay the crews these visits but not since Ryan was hired.

“We mustn’t bother Richard with this” Ryan would say. So, questions and decisions were handled without going to Richard mostly.

One day, while painting part of an indoor set, Kelsie decided to ask Leo if he had ever heard of Viola Crenshaw.

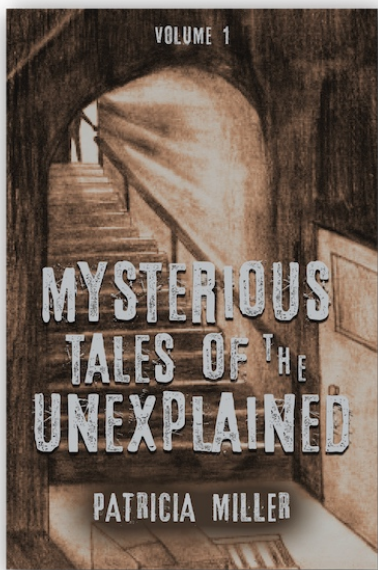
“Viola Crenshaw?” he repeated. “No, I don’t believe so. But if she was an actress in this theatre, she’s sure to be found in the theatre scrapbooks.” He suggested Kelsie look in the front office.

While the crew was taking a break, Kelsie took his advice and sure enough, came across old photos and newspaper clippings. I walked in and found her staring with her mouth hanging wide open, stunned. Viola Crenshaw was a beauty in her younger days. The articles called her a brilliant actress, just as Mr. Bates had said. Kelsie was finally convinced.

That night, when we were together, Kelsie kept talking of nothing other than the glamorous outfits in the photos, her raving performance reviews, and all that fame

and success. She continually talked of the huge difference between the Viola of yesterday and that of today.

She told me, that night she couldn't sleep and finally turned on her reading light to try to read her eyes into sleep. Finally, her eyelids bobbed up and down. She snapped off the beam of light, not bothering to return her book to the nightstand. Mental fatigue had taken its toll.



Singing specters, secret passageways, unsolved clues, abandoned mansions, old photo albums and hidden motives are all found in the four stories making up this unique collection, *Mysterious Tales of the Unexplained*.

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