

When a new doctor begins practice at St. John's, a horrifying disease invades the hospital, striking down patients with its grotesque symptoms. Who or what is causing this disease? Is it a virus, or is it pure evil?

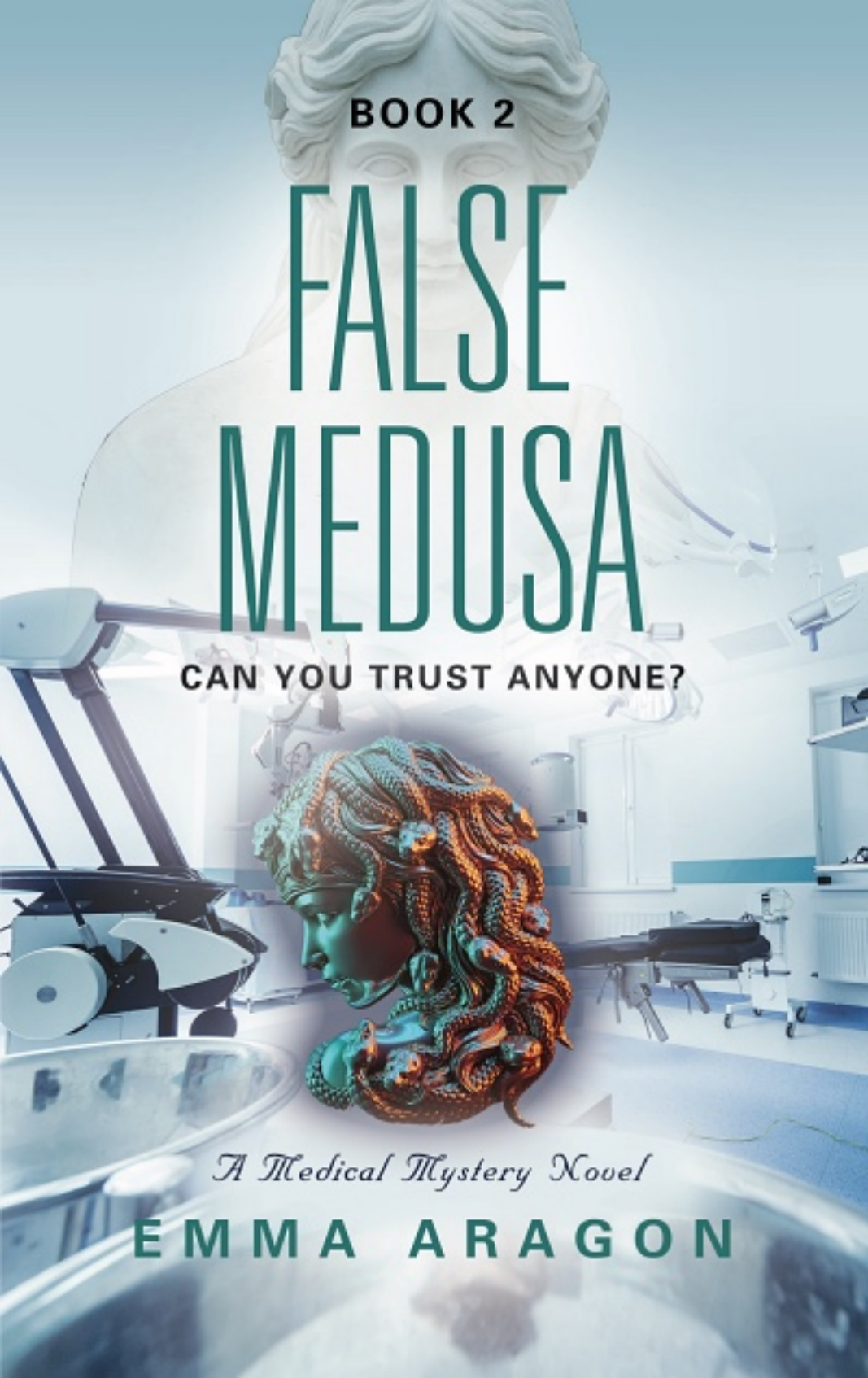
False Medusa

By Emma Aragon

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BOOK 2

FALSE MEDUSA

CAN YOU TRUST ANYONE?

A Medical Mystery Novel

EMMA ARAGON

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1.

Emily leaned her head back on the car seat as she and Roger drove away from the funeral. The noon sun shone green flickers of light through the sunroof. Emily had no tears for her godmother; Addie's death had been a gift, a release from the pain of pancreatic cancer. The hospice nurses kept her supplied with drops of morphine under her tongue, and she had been cheerful and lucid almost to the end, when she fell asleep, a dusty rattle in her throat that finally faded away, and she never woke again.

She was only sixty years old, but she hadn't complained about dying relatively young.

"I was always thankful you came to me after your mom died," she had said, holding Emily's hand. Emily was glad that she'd visited Addie in Minneapolis just a few months ago, and then again right before Addie died. Roger had found and hired a woman...Janet...who was not only a fine nurse but also a live-in companion for Addie. Emily remembered hearing them shrieking with laughter during a card game. No one had any regrets.

Now it was time to drive to Addie's house on Lake Nokomis and deal with Addie's belongings. The house was already sold; they didn't have to worry about that. Emily didn't want to keep much—just Addie's few pieces of jewelry and some family photos.

As they walked up the porch steps to the double front door, Roger commented, "I wonder why she never got married."

“The rest of the family called her an ‘old maid,’ although they all loved her,” Emily said. “Marriage isn’t for everybody.” She gave Roger a quick one-armed hug as he unlocked the door to the empty house. Already there was a sad, abandoned feel to the house where Emily had grown up. Emily sighed. “Oh damn. I guess we’d better get to work.”

On the dining room table was a large bag carefully labeled, “To Janet with love and thanks.” Janet would be by to pick it up. An attorney friend would straighten things out and ensure that Addie’s medium-sized wealth was distributed as Addie wished. No one was worried. After a lingering glance around the living room, Emily followed Roger upstairs and began on the closets.

“Wow! She had some fancy stuff!” Roger said, holding up a few sequined gowns on their hangers.

“Yes, she belonged to a few groups, like the Symphony Society, that had some gala events. We can take them to a high-end thrift shop.”

The two of them worked for hours, sorting, folding, and packing, until Roger said, “Let’s stop for now and come back tomorrow. I’m getting hungry.”

“Okay, one more closet...the one in the guest bedroom. It’s sure to be almost empty.” Emily opened the folding doors and stumbled on something on the floor. She looked down and, trying not to scream, called, “Roger! Come here, quick!”

Roger appeared at the door almost instantly, looked where Emily was pointing as she backed away, and said, “What in the hell is that?”

“It...it looks like Francie.”

“Who’s Francie?”

“Francie was Janet’s dog,” Emily said. “Addie didn’t mind Francie living here; she loved dogs. Oh dear.”

Roger bent over the body of the nondescript dog, obviously a rescue hound, and said, “She looks dead, but why isn’t there any odor?”

Emily reached out with a trembling hand, touched the dog, and yanked her hand back with a gasp. “She’s warm!”

“So she isn’t dead,” Roger said. Just then Francie half-opened her eyes. The warm brown pupils had gray specks in them, almost like snowflakes. “What are those?” Roger asked.

“Roger, I think Francie is really, really sick...maybe about ready to die. Let’s take her to a vet right away.”

“Agreed,” said Roger. Francie was a medium-sized dog, but when Roger tried to lift her, he grunted and said, “She’s incredibly heavy. I can hardly get her off the floor. Emily, I may need help.” As together they lifted the dog off the floor, they noticed that the dog was not flexible at all; her body stayed in the same position, as if frozen. “What in the hell?” Roger muttered as they carried Francie down the stairs. “She’s completely stiff, as though she has rigor mortis, but she’s still warm and I can feel her heart beating...slowly, though.”

“Well,” said Emily, panting a little from carrying the dog, “I think this is Francie’s last day on earth, poor baby. She was a good dog.”

At the words “good dog,” Francie opened her eyes a slit. The very tip of her tail twitched a little.

“It’s as though she’s tied up or something,” Roger said as they slid her into the back seat of the car. “I’ve never

seen anything like this in my life.” He searched in his cellphone for the nearest veterinary office, which was only a few miles away. “Okay, let’s take her to Dr. Doolittle.”

“You’re kidding.”

“Yeah, I’m kidding. His name is Dr. Donnelly. Close enough, though.”

Somebody at the clinic held the door open while Emily and Roger carried Francie in. The receptionist’s eyes widened. “What have we here?” she asked.

“Beats me,” said Roger, “and I’m a doctor. I’ve never run across anything like this. This is my wife’s godmother’s nurse’s dog,” Roger said. “I know that sounds complicated, so don’t try to figure it out. We were cleaning out the house after the godmother’s funeral and found this still-living beastie on a closet floor.”

As Emily and Roger lowered Francie carefully to the floor, Dr. Donnelly emerged from an examining room in his white coat. “Good heavens!” he said, looking at Francie. “What seems to be the trouble here? Was there an accident?”

“That’s what you’re supposed to tell us,” Roger said. “Should we bring her into an examining room?”

“Please.” Dr. Donnelly led the way down the hall to another room. “Put her on this table.” He first took her paw and tried to move it, but it seemed fixed in place. He also tried that with her neck and hips, with the same result. Then he took out his stethoscope and listened up and down her whole body before hanging the stethoscope back around his neck.

“Her heart is beating, but much too slowly. She has no bowel sounds at all. I’d say she’s close to death and should

be euthanized, although I have no way of knowing whether she's in pain or not. Is she your dog?"

"She's my godmother's dog," Emily said. "Since we just came from my godmother's funeral, I think it's more than fitting, since Francie's in this condition, that she go to join my godmother."

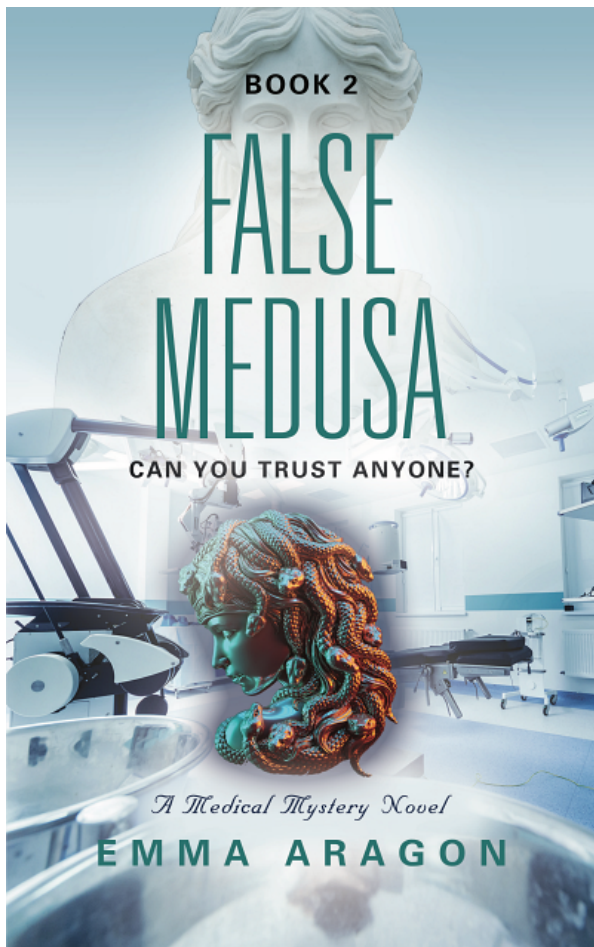
"Yes, I think so, too," Dr. Donnelly said, stroking Francie's sleek brown head. He turned to Roger and Emily

"I have a favor to ask," the doctor said. "Could I keep this body for an autopsy? There is something curious going on here that I would like to learn about."

"Absolutely," Roger said. "I'm a doctor myself, and I would like to know the results of the autopsy."

"No problem," Dr. Donnelly answered, "and no charge for the procedure since we're going to use the body."

"Goodbye, Francie," Emily said, stroking the dog's ear, which was still silky and pliant. *Now* she felt like crying. They would have to leave a message for Janet. Lord, what a day.



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