



PARTICLES
OF
MURDER

A SHADOW OF DEATH SERIES, BOOK ONE
BESTSELLING AUTHOR

CHARLOTTE
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Particles of Murder

Chapter Sample

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Antagonists didn't exist; the story simply wasn't told from their point of view.

Tell that to the other students in my creative writing class, and they would argue all sorts of things from cause and effect, right and wrong, morals and ethics and philosophy. But the truth of it was, antagonists were always protagonists in their own story.

Storytelling had long existed before the written word, but writing down a story helped to ensure that nothing was twisted so the heart of the story remained intact. The heart of the story was what pushed life into every word, what forced the reader to keep reading. That was why I would write down my point of view.

So, please, let me explain. I was not as cold-hearted or evil as the media would paint me one day.

I was sitting in my Introduction to Creative Writing class on a Wednesday. I remember it was a Wednesday because I had already attended three classes and this was my last one. I had a Styrofoam cup of coffee in front of me. All of the other students in my class were chatting with each other, so full of exhilaration that it made me wonder if they skipped all their classes or if I was just missing some part of my brain that allows all of the walls to come down and joy to flood in.

The professor--only distinguishable by the fact that he was clearly not in his late teens or early twenties by his face, though his jeans and white t-shirt weren't that different from some students' attire--rushed to the large desk in the front and set down his bag. He began pulling out packets of paper. A hush came over the class. Some students perked up, while others leaned back into their chairs with the kind of smile they would save for a close friend. Those students were happier now that the professor was here than when he wasn't, which was something I had never seen before.

The professor clapped his hands together.

"All right. This is Intro to Creative Writing and I'm Dr. John Zimmer. If you're not supposed to be here, I suggest you get up and try to slink away without anyone noticing. There's a hundred percent chance you'll be unsuccessful, but I'll enjoy watching you try."

Nobody moved. Even if someone was in the wrong class, I suspected they would still stay, but not out of shame. There was something magnetic about this professor, like his smile made

everyone feel like there wasn't anything but hope in the world. But I supposed that's how a professor could get tenure. The students, after all, were the ones who would judge them at the end of the semester.

"Okay, good. Nobody here is lost--at least, not lost in this academic building," he said. "Now, I know you all hate ice breakers--in fact, I'm sure some of you couldn't care less who the person sitting next to you is, but we're going to do one anyway because this is my class, you have to do what I say to pass, and, quite frankly, it's rather rude when you don't know the names of the people you're going to be around all semester. So, I want you to take out a piece of paper and write down what your biggest fear is."

I took out a piece of paper and a pen. As everyone began jotting their thoughts down, I felt stuck.

What did I fear most?

Losing a loved one, being abandoned, the act of dying, what comes after death--but that wasn't interesting. That wouldn't set me apart from what all of these other people are saying, and I detested the idea of being ordinary.

I felt heat rush into my face as some people began setting their pens down. He was going to ask everyone to tell the class their fears soon. I had to jot down something or risk looking like an idiot who thought they were fearless.

I wrote down the first thought that came into my mind: *not being valuable or valued*.

The words hurt--this neediness inside me that begged for approval. It wasn't how writers or any creative person was supposed to be. I should be creating art for my own pleasure, but I didn't. I wanted to scribble out the words, but Dr. Zimmer clapped his hands again. I hadn't noticed that he had picked up a metal trash can from beside his desk. He held it up near his waistline.

"Good. Everyone is finished. Now I want you to crumple that piece of paper up and throw it into this trash can," he said. "Don't worry, I'll transfer them all to a recycling bin. This is just symbolic."

As I threw my crumpled piece of paper in, it hit against his thigh before dropping down near his feet. As he picked it up, he looked straight at me. He tossed it in the can, making my fears disappear with a simple gesture.

"You didn't think I'd actually make you tell your fears aloud, did you?" he teased. "No, I wouldn't. Let this be a lesson in this classroom: I don't ever want you to feel uncomfortable-- unless you want to be. I absolutely endorse all of you to push yourselves and when you're ready, I want you to cross that threshold into discomfort because that's where all the glory is and that's where you'll set yourselves free...but I will never force you to reveal parts of yourself that you don't want to reveal. You have all the power when you hold that pen or pencil. You create world, you create the image of yourself, you create the image of others...you are a god. Remember that."

The girl next to me smiled as she took in my surprised face. Hadn't most of college been about being forced to do things and being told that we had no power because we weren't the authority figures?

The girl offered me her hand.

"I'm Victoria," she said. "I've already taken this class, but I love listening to Dr. Zimmer. Trust me--if you're impressed now, you haven't seen anything yet. He's the best."

She turned back to her bag and pulled out a book. She handed it to me. The title was *Insomniac Rites*.

"He wrote this," she said. "I, uh...I want somebody to read it with fresh eyes and I think you'd really like it. You seem like a really genuine person and I want to know what someone like you would think about the protagonist."

I nodded. "Sure. I'll read it. I have a really busy schedule, though—"

"Don't worry about it," she said. "There's no rush. You can take all semester or even over the summer if you want to. I really want you to absorb it all and not rush through it."

"Okay," I said. "I'll...well, um, thanks. Thanks for noticing me out of everyone."

She flashed me a smile. She was a truly beautiful woman. She was the kind of person who was invited to all of the fraternity parties and got into them for free with all of the fraternity brothers trying to get her drunk enough to sleep with, but she would be too respectable to get drunk.

“To tell you the truth, I read your fear while you wrote it down,” she said. “I’ve done this exercise three times and I’ve never been that honest. So...thank you for inspiring me that way.”

She’d peeked at my fear? She knew.

Dr. Zimmer began to talk again, but I didn’t notice what he was saying. My mind was clouded with so much anger, I could almost imagine the room catching fire from my rage.

She knew my secret. She knew my fear. She violated my privacy and for what? To use me to judge her professor’s book?

Fuck her.

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