

*By Steven W. Horn*

Sam Dawson Mystery Series

THE PUMPKIN EATER

WHEN GOOD MEN DIE

WHEN THEY WERE YOUNG

NO GOOD DEED

*Also by Steven W. Horn*

ANOTHER MAN'S LIFE

# NO GOOD DEED

A Sam Dawson Mystery

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*For Glendolene*



# PART I



# WAITED TOO LONG

NOVEMBER 1903

The late November storm settled quietly over the city of Cheyenne. A gray blanket of snow-laden clouds had crept in unnoticed from the west, dragging its ponderous belly down the street toward the courthouse and scattering tiny flakes of snow, messengers of what was to come.

She raised her hand to touch a frosty swirl inside the cold hotel windowpane overlooking the scene below. *We spend much of our lives waiting for death*, she thought. *It's rarely a surprise*. Her eyes were heavy with tears that would not flow. She had been trying to convince herself she had done everything possible to save him, but she knew there had to have been something more. It was her fault. She had waited too long.

Despite the earlier threat of snow that now fogged the morning air, the atmosphere outside had become carnival-like. *A deathwatch should be solemn*. From her vantage point above, she watched the press writhing like maggots on decaying meat. She hated them. They had tried and convicted him in their fabricated court of public opinion, and destroyed her in the process—though he was the main event and she nothing more than a sideshow attraction.

A ripple undulated through the crowd as it pressed against the line of guardsmen encircling the building, their rifles at port arms. She glanced at the mantel clock on the hotel bureau across the room. It was 11:08. Placing her hand on the window glass to steady herself, she leaned forward, her neck craned to the west in an attempt to see down the alley where the hearse was parked. Her warm breath steamed the icy windowpane. She wiped it with her sleeve then studied her reflection. It was shadowy, like her, with dark circles under eyes that craved emotional relief. She tucked a curl of hair behind her ear, slowly shaking her head from side to side. Her perfect lips suggested disappointment.

Several reporters broke from the crowd and hurried off to file their lies with their editors. Others tussled with their crews and each other, setting up their bulky camera equipment, jockeying for position. "Maggots," she whispered.

She would be next. The vultures were already circling, waiting for her to stop struggling so they could peck out her eyes. The prosecuting attorney, an alcoholic running for office, was riding this bandwagon at the front of the parade. The rummy-eyed bantam rooster knew how to manipulate the press to his advantage and had cleverly used them during the trial. He had made a show of publicly swearing out the arrest warrant on her for perjury. The sheriff on the other hand had been sympathetic, even kind. He had repeatedly apologized to her after her arrest and had moved her out of the jail. She was put under house arrest at the hotel with a deputy posted in the hallway. She

was even allowed to take her meals in the hotel restaurant while the deputy sipped coffee a few tables away.

It was unfair, all of it. She hated this city. She hated this state. Ultimately, she came back only because an innocent man was going to be executed for a crime she knew he did not commit. She had waited too long. Both sides knew what she had. The prosecutor had sent one of his minions all the way to Kansas City with offers of money if she would return and testify for the state. She had refused. Instead, she had repeatedly offered to testify for the defense. But his attorneys said they did not need her, that he would be acquitted based on the points of law. Now only the governor could stop this injustice. Himself a lawyer, he knew there were grounds for a pardon, at least a commutation. However, he was vulnerable. As the former secretary of state, he was the unelected successor to the recently deceased governor. The press smelled blood. They would destroy him. He would lose the party's nomination for a legitimate term in an office that he found fulfilling, both economically and socially. Still, he had no choice. He had to meet with her.

Twenty-four years old and from a highly respected family, educated, and experienced in dealing with egocentric men, she made her case before the governor. Surely he would see how powerful and just it was. Undressing her with his eyes, he seemed more interested in her than in her sworn statement. His flirtatious remarks dripped with innuendo concerning her relationship with the condemned man, and men in general. He was slimy, but she refused

to be intimidated by his insinuations and his offensive solicitations, unexpected as they were. She hadn't expected being arrested within a few hours of her meeting with him either, charged with lying. Three others had also submitted affidavits in Tom's defense, yet she was the only one accused of perjury. The only one arrested.

The press was making hay with the fact that she was being represented by Blake Kennedy, one of the attorneys who had lost the case against the state for which a man was about to be executed. She had no choice. She was broke. John, who believed her and believed Tom, was paying for her defense. He had stood by both of them through the trial, then the appeal. She had seen John less than an hour earlier as he rushed down the alley, head bowed, wiping tears from his eyes after saying goodbye to Tom.

She took a deep breath and released it slowly. She had wanted to say goodbye too, to tell him what every man should know before he dies, that he will be remembered. She wanted to tell him about Victoria. She owed him that much. She wanted to tell him to name names and stop protecting the people who had betrayed him. But she struggled with the prospect. The press would have exploited her visit. They had already falsely stated that she had met with her lover in jail. *What does it matter? I'm already ruined.* There was so much she needed to tell him. *I waited too long.*

Two men carried his body on a stretcher to the hearse. It was covered with a dark rubber sheet. Men she did not recognize, dressed in black suits, accompanied it. A fine

snow swirled down from the overcast sky. One of the men stood back and slowly removed his spectacles. He pulled a white handkerchief from his coat pocket and wiped the lenses before placing them back on his face, carefully wrapping the wires behind each ear. They would take him to the Gleason Mortuary, then to the train station. It was over. She had waited too long. Tom Horn had been hanged.