

*Dying To Be Beautiful*  
*Mystery Series*

*Book 3: 'Fake Beauty'*  
*By*  
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*Flowers are on the cover are morning glories.*

*Do I dare depend upon you for firm friendship dear morning glory?*

Haiku Poem

Thursday, 8am

The author of bestselling book, "Looking Beautiful" wasn't looking so beautiful.

Jordan Kennedy was found stuffed into the window of the local bookstore.

The bookstore was now on fire with Jordan Kennedy looking like a dead Raggedy Ann doll, tossed on top of copies of her books that were beginning to burn...as was she.

There were posters of her book signing scheduled for the coming Saturday plastered throughout The Hamptons. Many of them had a huge red X marked across them.

There was someone watching the fire that looked very familiar to Jenna Preston.

*"There's no end to people Dying to be Beautiful in The Hamptons."*

## Chapter 1

### Author in the Window

“What the hell?”

Jenna literally gasped as she noticed Michael Preston, her father’s brother, standing across the street, watching the fire and murder scene unfold, Raace Scanlon standing on his left turning to whisper something to him.

Many years ago Jenna had a brief affair with Raace. It ended almost as quickly as it began, yet even after all this time Jenna’s heart skipped a beat when she saw him. It was not because she had feelings for him anymore, but because she was concerned about things he knew about her, secrets he had discovered after reading a journal in the nightstand next to her bed. She still felt anger at his betrayal, at first confronting him, yelling, furious and then barely speaking to him afterwards, even though over the years they often were at the same restaurants and parties.

As a private investigator her inner voice was shouting, “What the hell are those two doing here? Damn them.”

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The Hamptons had changed...a lot

Over the last twenty years, more and more of the wealthy landed on its shores building homes of excessive size, bringing along excessive demands for whatever it is they wanted and it seemed that this excess also brought along more crime and murders.

Each year and each season the area known as The Hamptons which stretches across the south shore of the far eastern end of Long Island, opens its doors to the wealthy.

“Hampton Local,” meant you were native born, or lived here for at least fifty years. Some stayed and shook their heads in dismay at the influx of money. Some stayed and made a lot of money off the summer intruders. Some sold and moved to a place where they perceived, or at least hoped, there could be a better quality of life for them.

There was an odd and mixed sense of reality, myth and wishful thinking among the inhabitants. Like this morning’s fire, there was a perception by the onlookers that the fire had started innocently enough. It was hard to believe someone would want to cause such damage in The Hamptons a place that took so much pride in its beauty.

Yet the sound of fire engines and police cars blaring their sirens and the acrid smell of smoke billowing upwards from the fire were all warning signs to get out of the way.

Jenna, Dave and the two Setters, Watson and Aggie, had been on a walk from the beach to town and were ready for coffee and morning sweet rolls at the bakery café in town.

That was not going to happen this morning.

Jenna’s Irish Setter, Watson, was not keen on heeding warnings.

“Watson, hold on,” shouted Jenna, as the red flowery wide brim hat she was wearing flew behind her almost hitting Aggie.

Watson, his red fur and tail flying was dragging Jenna towards the fire, as the much smaller and younger, Aggie, whimpering, was being carried by Dave. The smell of smoke was filling the air and the quiet, early fall morning was turning into chaos. Onlookers were gathering across the street from the bookstore that was about to be engulfed in flames.

“Dave, can you take Watson? I see Troy’s car, this had to be more than a fire. Also, if possible, collect my hat please.”

Watson continued to pull Jenna towards the chaos. Watson, it seemed, had a nose for murder!

There was a murder, and ultimately much more.

Dave, the love of her life and well really, her hot romance, was a veterinarian, who also raised Irish Setters. They first met when she bought Watson from him a few years ago. It was practically love at first sight, for people and dogs. Recently she had been attempting to dismiss the demons stopping her from marrying him.

Dave, like Detective Troy Johnson, Jenna’s partner in crime solving, was local, born and raised on the north fork farmland. They, and their families before them, had a history with this land. Taking good care of it mattered to them...a lot.

Even Jenna Preston, was considered a newcomer, having lived out here for only a little over twenty years.

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“Jenna I’ve got Aggie. Give me Watson’s leash.”

“Ok, but you know he’s not going to be happy about this.”

Dave kneeled down, gently stroked Watson's head to calm him. Hoping to keep him from tearing through town.

"Jenna, why is he acting like this?"

"It's as if he senses something happening at the fire."

Jenna looked at Dave, tall, good-looking, his moral character compelling to her right from the beginning. She saw the look on his face before she continued on toward the fire, concern and compassion. Concern for her. Compassion for Watson and Aggie.

When they had sex it was love.

"What the hell am I waiting for?"

Dave told her, "I believe when two people love each other as much as we do, that they should be living together as husband and wife."

She was still ambivalent, mired in a fear that stopped her from saying yes.

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Sergeant Stan Miller was already at the fire helping another officer put up crime scene tape. When that was done he was pushing back onlookers, forcing several people to move out of the street and stopping the media from rushing towards the burning building in their efforts to take photos.

Lara Stern, head of The Hampton Police forensic lab and James Parker, who now worked for both the police and Jenna, would be there soon to gather evidence and take photos. They certainly didn't need media interference.

Jenna reached the fire minutes after two fire trucks and the chief were there, turning fire hoses on the flames as they seem to grow with intensity...quickly and violently.

A third fire truck was on the way to the scene from one of the neighboring communities, more sirens blasting into the fall morning.

This was easily a three-alarm fire, flames eagerly jumped from the back door throughout the two-story bookstore at the edge of town. The whole block would eventually have to be sealed off as a crime scene. Now, the only bookstore in the community, its size and book purchasing connections, forcing the two smaller, locally owned bookstores out of business.

Inside the front window Jenna saw books sprawled all over, some ripped, some tossed on top of what looked to be a very dead woman. Jenna realized it was the woman she had met at a luncheon the day before.

The fire suddenly blasted into the front of the bookstore, where the woman had been spread out, with a huge red X across her face.

Two of the firemen broke through the front window and pulled out the body and some of the books that were on top of her. Jenna noticed that on top of the body was a copy of the popular children's book, *The Beauty and The Beast*. The fire had spread rapidly to the front of the store; they had to hurry to hand the woman's already charred body to Detective Johnson and Sergeant Miller.

Within minutes of pulling her out, the fire exploded throughout the entire bookstore with a noise that rocked the small village for blocks. More people started

coming out of their homes; those who lived nearby heard the fire engines and smelled the smoke as the explosion tore through the village with a fierce intensity.

Sergeant Miller yelled, "I'm going to arrest the whole goddamn lot of you who try to come any closer for photos. You know not to cross crime scene lines."

At the same time Troy shouted, "Miller, stay by the body for now. Doc Bishop will be here any minute. I'm going to ask Jenna to help with the owner of the bookstore while we wait for Doc to get the body."

Blake Wilson, owner of the bookstore was standing in the middle of the street hysterical, screaming, "Put out the damn fire. What the hell are you doing?"

Detective Johnson shoved him out of the street and waved Jenna over to see if she could calm him down.

"Jenna, take Blake to the police station. Miller and I have to take care of the crime scene and talk to Chief Bradley about the fire. When we were handed the body he yelled to me, 'I smelled something like gasoline.' Most likely what was used to start the fire. I would bet my reputation on it being arson. Doc Bishop is taking the body back to the morgue and Lara will get started on forensic investigation as soon as she can get near the building. Right now seems like she is dealing with James. Looks like something happened to him."

Jenna heard Doc who arrived minutes before yell to his intern, "Get the body into the van. Now!"

The fire chief was shouting, "Everyone move, the building is about to collapse."

The fire trucks stayed as close as possible, so they could still make an effort to put out some of the fire.

Searching the crowd for her Uncle Michael and Raace, as Jenna walked Wilson to the police station, she was aware they had disappeared from the scene. It made no sense to her that her uncle was in The Hamptons at this time. He was only here when there was some big party or celebrity event. And Raace, who knew what the hell he might be up to, let alone the two of them together.

“Damn them,” she muttered to herself

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Fall had arrived in The Hamptons with soft, slightly cooler breezes off the ocean that felt glorious after the heat and humidity of a Long Island summer. Acres of pumpkins, corn, and fall flowers dressed the landscape.

Best of all for those who lived here year round, many of the summer residents had packed up their bathing suits, fancy cars and left with their egos and arrogance.

The East End towns and villages were still busy and active, but traffic no longer dominated the highways. It also no longer felt as if it was a real threat to life and limb when crossing the streets.

Over the last decade the increase in the number of outsiders moving to the area, mostly for the prolonged summer season, had increased significantly. Excess was everywhere.

The "Season" in The Hamptons used to only be June, July and August. Since 9/11 it had expanded to May to September, with some summer people now living in the area year round.

The value of homes and land had increased significantly. There was a news story about a home that only four years earlier sold for a little under \$600,000. Two years later the buyer listed it for over a million dollars. This was a sweet, lovely home, yes, but there was no pool and it was not by the bay or ocean. The price asked was excessive.

That was the key word for so much happening in The Hamptons in recent years-Excessive.

Troy and Dave who had grown up in the area expressed dismay over the changing quality of life. There was a negative effect on the lifestyle of the locals and on small businesses that served them. Some of those businesses were even replaced by big box stores. Then, of course, there was the harm to the environment and the natural habitat of the area.

In the past plovers had been killed, chemicals dumped in the bay causing problems for the marine life and then, of course there was the recently exposed issue of dogs being tied to construction company fences at the end of summer, left to die when their owners were finished for the season.

It would be foolish to believe The Hamptons became some version of Paradise because the calendar changed and days were shorter.

If that was the case there would not be, what was apparently another murder.

Over the past five years Jenna Preston's private investigation firm had worked with The Hamptons police to help solve several nasty murder cases.

She remarked to Troy, "I'm not sure what's worse, the crimes or the people who commit them."

