

PAINT ME A CRIME by Holly Yew

EXCERPT

She was completely lost in her own little art world when the gallery doors closed with a click.

“Madeleine? Are you there?”

Jessamine walked over to the doors and pulled at the handles. They wouldn't turn. She was locked inside.

She knocked on the door. “Hello? I'm locked in here.”

She couldn't hear anything on the other side of the doors and, even though her gut told her something was wrong, she tried to remain calm and think of a logical reason for the locked doors.

Her panic didn't subside for long as another sense flared alive, and her heart started pounding. She knew what was happening even before the high-pitched alarm went off.

She could smell it.

Smoke.

Jessamine started banging on the doors even louder. “Help! I'm trapped in here!”

No answer. She took out her phone and dialed 911 and told the operator what was happening before she searched for another way out. The blackout blinds were all electronic, and once she found the switch to pull them up, they seemed to take forever to rise. Her impatience with the whirring sound grew worse as it was becoming more and more difficult to breathe. Jessamine held up her arm in front of her mouth to block out the smoke that started to seep into the gallery through the cracks in the double doors.

When the blinds were finally up, she let out a strangled sob when she realized that none of the windows could actually open. Hurrying to the other side of the room, she searched for another way out, but there was only a large bookshelf at that end. Her only option now was to break one of the windows. She looked around on the bookshelf for something heavy enough to do the job and read the spine of the thickest book she could find. The Complete Collection of Jules Verne: Volume One sat perched in the middle of the highest shelf.

Jessamine said a quick apology to the beautifully bound book as she stood on her tiptoes to reach it.

It took a moment for her to realize what was happening next. A few seconds after Jessamine picked up the book, she stumbled forward into a black hole. Her senses were completely off balance as she stood and tried to make sense of what had happened. The bookshelf had shifted sideways, and she was now in another room.