

It was early morning when she stepped outside the door. Fog still blanketed the city, drifting through the streets and in between buildings with the icy breeze coming in from the northern shore. Putting the chill to her back, Ivy bundled her shawl around her shoulders and strode off down the cobblestone street.

She followed a familiar route south, brick walls closing in on either side as she went deeper into the narrow, labyrinthine roads of Ratholme. It wasn't far to her destination, but already she was regretting her decision not to put on her gloves. Well, 'decision' might be a strong word for it-- she'd overslept once again, no thanks to that cruddy Clockwork time-piece that never seemed to wake her up on days she actually needed it to.

Taking a right turn onto Barden Street, she had to lift her skirts as she splashed through a muddy puddle. Not that mud would show up on the black fabric, but she was on a calling; it would behoove her to appear professional. Out of the corner of her eye she could just barely see Daenhearth, the polished obsidian roof peeking out over the smaller buildings that surrounded it. For a moment the cold wind lashed her cheek, carrying with it a whiff of the salty sea, before being blocked again as Ivy passed in front of a bakery. She was up so early that not even that was open, though she could see the shape of Mrs. Abernathy moving behind the faded curtains.

Ivy's stomach rumbled longingly, but there was nothing for it. She couldn't afford to be late. Not to Daenhart. The coroner kept a tight schedule.

She took a left at the next cross street, then hurried kitty-corner across the closely built plaza and dove into a side alley, which delivered her onto the main causeway of Ratholme-- as much as such a place could claim to have a main causeway-- Vairturn Boulevard. Before her were the two buildings she sought, easily recognizable with their white stone walls that required so much dedication to maintain against the smoke of the city. Constables idled on the sidewalk before them, exchanging gossip before the beginning of their morning rounds, and just behind the twin structures Ivy could hear the sounds of the harbor: clanging bells, shouting sailors, the cries of seabirds.

Before she crossed, she quickly patted her belt with her numb fingers. It was all there: chalk, candles, matches, leeches, her knife. Everything she needed for a calling. With a last huffed breath to warm her hands, Ivy looked both ways for trolley cars and jogged across the road. There were five steps leading up to the left-hand entrance, and an equal number to the one on the right. Ivy climbed the left set, to the building they called Daenhart. The official name was carved in the stone above the heavy wooden doors: Morgue.

The door opened noiselessly. Though identical on the exterior, the interiors of the two buildings were vastly different. Where Lornehart had a large, open space filled with tens of desks, always buzzing with the clicking of mechanical typing, Daenhart had a small lobby at the entrance, painted stark white with polished stone floors, a rather severe looking secretary sitting behind a wooden desk, and one marble bench for the uncommon visitor.

She was not an uncommon visitor, nor were her hearthmen, but still the secretary frowned at her, peering over the bronze keys of her typewriter.

"You're late," she said sternly. Ivy looked up, at the time-piece hanging on the wall behind the woman's head. It had yet to strike five.

Ivy opened her mouth to tell her that she wasn't late, thank you very much, when the black painted wooden doors to her right swung open. In the doorway stood a skeletal, pale man, a pair of spectacles balanced on his nose, thinning brown hair brushed back from his forehead. "Ah, right on time," said the Coroner, already beginning to roll up his shirt sleeves. "Shall we get started?"

"At your leisure, doctor," Ivy replied politely. He smiled and turned to lead her into the laboratory. She followed, but only after casting a smug look in the secretary's direction. Her frown deepened, but she didn't have time to say anything before the doors swung shut behind them.