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The Grays of Truth

by Sharon Virts



About the Book

From bestselling historical true-crime author Sharon Virts comes a gripping tale of murder and deceit.

In Reconstruction-era Baltimore, members of the city?s elite keep turning up dead. Below the polished surface of high society, there are illicit affairs, jilted lovers, financial hardships and countless motives for murder. When Jane Gray Wharton?s husband, Ned, dies unexpectedly while overnighting at his brother?s home, Jane has no reason to question the circumstances of his death. But on a visit to the same house a few weeks later, both Jane and her daughter fall gravely ill, and Jane begins to suspect foul play.

Though a trained chemist and former nurse, Jane is haunted by a history of delusion, loss and institutionalization. As the unexpected and devastating deaths begin to multiply, Jane?s grip on reality starts to slip. When a respected army officer falls terribly ill after visiting the Whartons? Baltimore home, Jane?s greatest fears become all too real. The time has come to act. But who will believe her? And can she even trust her own mind?

Inspired by true events involving one of Baltimore?s most powerful families, THE GRAYS OF TRUTH is the story of one woman?s quest for answers in her fight for redemption --- and to save the man she loves.

Discussion Guide

1. Jane Gray Wharton is depicted as an amateur chemist and former nurse with a history of delusion and institutionalization. How does her past shape her actions and decisions throughout the novel? Do you find her to be a reliable narrator, or do her experiences make you question her perspective?

2. Why do you think General Ketchum, despite knowing about Jane?s suspicions, continued to maintain a relationship with Ellen? Do you agree with the idea that men in the 19th century underestimated women?s capacity for poisoning and

murder, or do you think there could be another explanation?

3. The novel presents a blurred line between reality and delusion, especially from Jane?s viewpoint. How does Sharon Virts use this ambiguity to build suspense? At what points did you find yourself questioning what was real versus what was imagined?

4. Set in the Reconstruction era, the book portrays societal constraints on women, particularly through Jane?s experiences. How does Jane?s struggle for autonomy and credibility reflect the broader challenges faced by women during this period?

5. As the novel unfolds, numerous motives for murder come to light, involving love, betrayal and financial troubles. Which motive did you find most compelling, and why? Did you sympathize with any of the potential suspects?

6. Do you think Ellen Wharton?s beauty, charm, political influence and family name played a role in her treatment by the police? How much do you think these factors influenced the outcome of the trial, and how might things have been different without them?

7. Unlike traditional detective stories, Jane herself is a suspect in her own mind, constantly doubting her sanity. How does this affect your engagement with the story and your empathy for Jane?

8. The Wharton family, like many others in the book, is filled with secrets and hidden motives. How do these dynamics drive the plot forward? Were there any family members whose intentions you questioned more than others?

9. The novel is set in Baltimore during the Reconstruction era, a time of great social upheaval and change. How does the setting influence the events of the story? Could this story have taken place in another time or place, or is it uniquely tied to its setting?

10. The novel is described as a story of one woman?s quest for answers in her fight for redemption. Do you think Jane achieves redemption by the end of the book? What does redemption mean for her character?

11. Even though THE GRAYS OF TRUTH is set in a historical context, are there themes or issues within the book that resonate with contemporary readers? How does the novel speak to today?s social or psychological issues?

Author Bio

Sharon Virts is a bestselling historical fiction author, gifted painter and passionate preservationist. After more than 25 years as a successful entrepreneur, she followed her deepest conviction: that the past is not a subject to be studied at a distance --- it is a living force that shapes who we are, how we see the world, and what we choose to protect.

She has authored four novels: MASQUE OF HONOR and BARGAINS OF FATE (books one and two of the six-part *Fields of Honor* series), the macabre mystery THE GRAYS OF TRUTH (an International Book Award winner), and the true-crime thriller VEIL OF DOUBT (a finalist for Best Historical Fiction 2024), with four more *Fields of Honor* novels forthcoming. Her work spans Virginia drawing rooms, frontier Florida, and post-Civil War Baltimore --- always grounded in meticulous research and vivid, breathing characters.

Sharon is also a visual artist --- a landscape painter who captures scenes the same way she writes: quickly, in the moment, wondering who else has stood in that same place. Her paintings have been exhibited and collected across the country.

In 2016, Sharon and her husband, Scott Miller, rescued Selma Mansion --- a historic 1810 Virginia estate on the verge of demolition --- and undertook a meticulous, top-to-bottom restoration that captured over 109,000 social followers and became one of the most-watched preservation stories in America. She has served as board chair of the Loudoun Museum for nine years and hosts a monthly TV segment, "Between the Lines," on Scripps stations, including WMAR Baltimore.

Every dollar from Sharon's books and paintings flows to the Virts Miller Foundation, funding education, health care and cultural preservation in Loudoun County. She lives at Selma with Scott and their three Labrador retrievers --- Polly, Cassie and Leda --- and is mother to four sons, stepmom to two, and "Nana" to Charlie, Bodhi and Aubry.

Critical Praise

?Inspired by a true story and meticulously researched, the underbelly of high society Reconstruction Era Baltimore is brought brilliantly to life in Sharon Virts?s atmospheric and deeply absorbing murder mystery THE GRAYS OF TRUTH. I loved it!?

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