

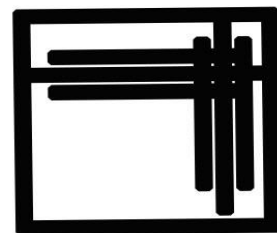
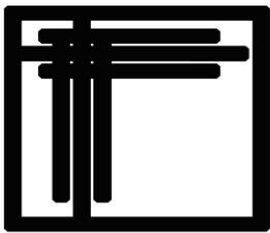


A DAIYU WU MYSTERY

# BLACK JADE

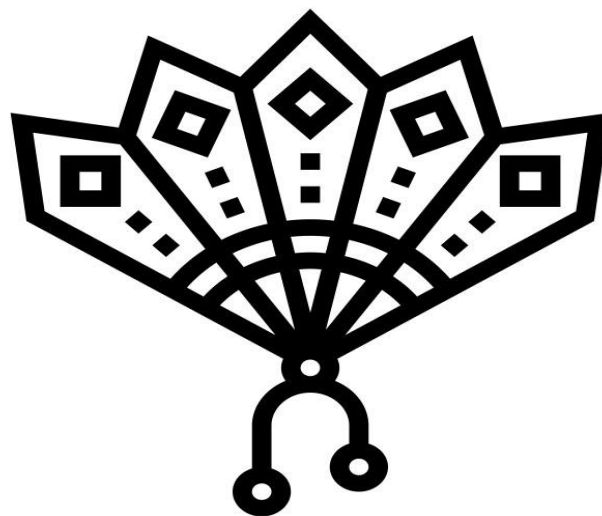
GLORIA OLIVER

*Bernard*

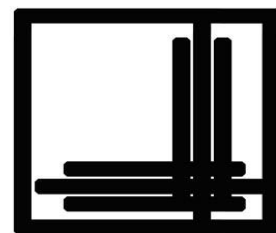
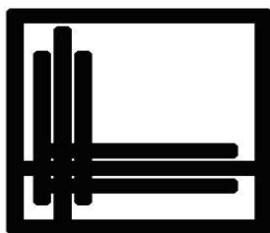


# BLACK JADE

A Daiyu Wu Mystery



**Gloria Oliver**



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**Black Jade**

A Daiyu Wu Mystery - Book 1

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## DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to Roxanne Longstreet Conrad, AKA Rachel Caine. Your passion and fertile imagination will be sorely missed. Thank you for all the marvelous adventures. You give us all something to aspire to.

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## CHAPTER 1

"Jacques, I need you!"

My copy of the *Dallas Morning News* twirled to the floor as I jumped to my feet. The rare emotions in the summons made my pulse race. It wasn't often that my companion felt either surprise or excitement, and I'd just heard both. "What is it, Dai?"

"Can you smell it?"

Daiyu was the only child of the immigrant Wu family. She was also the principal reason for the continued success of White Laundry. My companion wasn't what anyone would expect. She was more of a 'doll' than most women called by the moniker could ever hope to be. A mere four foot eight, she was a tiny thing—but assuming that was *all* she was would be a grave mistake.

"Lye? Soap?" I had no idea how anyone could smell anything else in here.

Dai half-turned on her stool, her dainty gloved hands on her lap. "Garlic, Jacques. I smell *burned* garlic."

Her straight black hair fell to just above her shoulders. It was untouched by the finger waves currently in fashion, so there was nothing to detract from its silky fall around her heart-shaped face and almond eyes. Her skin was the color of yellowed porcelain, but the bad lighting in the crowded work area made it seem darker, like transparent yellow amber. A line of perspiration trailed down her long neck, the only sign that she was bothered by the laundry's oppressive humidity. Her opaque teashade glasses sat ignored at their assigned spot on the worktable, along with the chemicals and powders she mixed for the family business. Her meticulous efforts and her enhanced sense of smell gave her family's company an edge over the few remaining Chinese laundries in town, and placed them at an even more significant advantage over the American ones. The glasses themselves were more to ease other people's discomfort than her own. She did not need them. Dai had been blind from birth, her unseeing eyes almost silver and possessing no pupils. Most thought the sight of them disturbing. To me, they were anything but.

"Do you see any garments colored bright green?" Dai's excitement rebounded in every word.

I was used to being her eyes. It was the main argument she'd used to win her parents' permission to keep my then seven-year-old self, whom she discovered following her at Dallas City Park. She'd been only eight, her mind already sharp and looking to the future.

"Yes. It's a ballgown by the looks of it. It's still hanging with the recent arrivals. Should I fetch it for you?"

"No, don't!" Dai shook her head. "Not without first donning gloves. No one should let that fabric touch their bare skin."

My eyebrow rose. What were we about to get into?

As commanded, I found a thick pair of workmen's gloves and fetched the gown. It was an old-fashioned evening dress, all gossamer and lace. Not something typically found in Texas—

more like New York or London, and at least thirty years ago, at that. I hung it nearby, making sure it wouldn't accidentally touch Dai.

"That's the one. Surely you can smell it now, can't you, Jacques?"

"I'm sorry, Dai, I can't. You know my nose is nothing compared to yours." I smelled no garlic and had no inkling why that would be a concern, or how it had led her to the conclusion that the gown's color would be green.

A sharp bark near Dai's feet drew our attention as her second companion left the comfort of his pillow. Another mongrel she'd picked up off the street, and as loyal as myself. At a guess, I figured him to be a Scottish Terrier and Pomeranian mix. His owner had abandoned him as a pup in the streets as money became scarce everywhere.

"No, Prince Razor, you mustn't get near it. Sit."

He did as she asked. Prince set his small paws neatly before him, and his expressive brown eyes watched her every move.

"Jacques, is there a ticket pinned to it?"

I checked. There was one, although... "It's blank, but stamped paid."

"Really? How curious." The timbre of excitement in her voice grew. "Here, run this swab over the dress. Hold your breath while you do it, just in case."

Still wondering what this could be about—and growing more nervous about it by the moment—I ran the swab down the length of the gown, then deposited it into the test tube she held. "What now?"

She gave me a teasing, coy smile. "Now we go to the *lab*." With a spring in her step, Dai grabbed her teashade glasses and led the way, knowing every nook and cranny of the establishment. Prince scouted ahead, in search of any errant mice who dared be in the vicinity. We passed several of the Chinese workers at the vats. They stared as we walked past, but as usual, said nothing. A superstitious lot, many carried charms with pictures of gourds, long believed to be capable of warding off or protecting the bearer against evil. The workers touched them whenever she drew near—despite the fact they owed her. If not for Dai, there might not be a business to employ them or homes purchased in their names so they could stay in the country. But she was both blind and female and had been allowed to live and thrive. Expectations and traditions practiced even in these modern times would have called for Dai's death when she was born—particularly since she was female and the family had no male heir. Even though from the time of Confucius the blind were supported in court as musicians, her parent's social class would not allow them to keep a child with such reduced status. But Dai's *mǔqīn* had lost all her other children before they were born, and hadn't been able to stomach the thought of giving up the one who'd made it through.

Going against convention and escalating social pressure were two reasons her family had abandoned all they knew, including their property and lofty status, to come to the land of the free. It was a fact they never spoke of, but one Dai never forgot. Yet even those who came to America to seek freedom from the class restrictions in their country still viewed her continued existence with fear. That she would not be shackled by her blindness somehow made her an abomination and therefore evil.

Dai's "lab" was located in a small corner of the cellar, which housed the bottom section of the laundry's large vats and pipes. It was damp and dark—not that the latter made any difference to her. But it kept others out, giving her privacy for what most considered unladylike pursuits. A hanging bulb had been added for my benefit, along with a hatch to make the room light-proof.

Prince dived under the table to keep watch back the way we'd come.



"I believe I have everything we'll require." Her hands ran over the small shelves in the corner, grabbing beakers, an oil lamp, and glass tubing.

"Required for what?" I mopped at my sweating brow.

"Why, to test for arsenic. What else?"

Arsenic? She thought the dress had poison on it? "Why would you ever think such a thing, Dai?"

"Please, Jacques—you read me an article on this just last year. Don't you remember?" She set a stopper in a flask and attached a glass tube to a funnel, which she then placed through one of the two holes on the stopper.

"My memory is far inferior to yours. As you so often enjoy reminding me."

"Why, yes, you're right. I do rather like that." She flashed me an impish grin. "But we digress. You see, arsenic was used before the turn of the century to create the color green in fabrics. But manufacturers weren't always conscientious about the amounts used in their dyes. Fatal cases were rare, but many consumers suffered health issues because of long-term exposure. Workers dyeing the textiles at the factories even more so."

More tubing led to a U-shaped vessel, which continued to another lengthy stretch of glass pipe clamped over the oil container of the lantern. "What is all this for?"

"Depending on its current oxidation, arsenic is odorless and, at times, colorless. So detecting it proved difficult for many years, until a brilliant man came up with the Marsh test. An ingenious and effective method of determining the amount of arsenic in the flesh, body fluids, and more." She ran her hands gingerly over the apparatus she'd made, double-checking her work. "If you'll place the swab into the beaker, I'll add the zinc and acid. By heating the mixture, we will further oxidize the arsine in the arsenic.

"Once that happens, please hold the ceramic bowl over the ensuing vapor. Then we shall see what we shall see."

Dai added the ingredients to the waiting flask. As the chemicals reacted with one another, I held the bowl above it. After that, applying heat to the container caused a silvery-black stain to appear.

"Did it stain?" she asked.

"Most definitely." It was black, dark as death.

Dai nodded as if she had expected nothing else. "The color and density of the stain are used to pinpoint the concentration of arsenic present. Unfortunately, it's not something I've dabbled in, so I've no data to compare it against. The pathologist should have access to a copy of Marsh's guide."

Prince Razor barked in agreement. Dai's excitement was becoming contagious.

"We must find out which of our employees handled the dress and have them wash off any residue right away. Also, have them turn the fans on high. We'll want to cycle the air as much as possible. Arsenic can convert to a gas, and since I detected the scent of a reaction, it's likely some got released upstairs. We were lucky a bit of the arsenic wasn't fully oxidized, so it reacted to the heat and the humidity here. Otherwise, we would have never known something was amiss. Whoever left the gown didn't count on Texas temperatures."

She paused for a long moment. I said nothing, still trying to digest all she'd just told me. Then she added, "Before that, please bag the bowl and the dress, as we must bring them with us. We're going on a field trip!"

"A field trip? Where to?"

"Why, to see the justice of the peace, Jacques! Where else?"

## CHAPTER 2

In a whirlwind, Dai cleaned up her space. She then scooped up Prince Razor and headed upstairs, leaving me with no straightforward explanation of what we were about to embark on. I took care to bag the bowl and the dress as instructed, and followed her.

After a few questions at the front of the store, I determined it had been Mei Ling who'd hung the gown in the new arrivals rack. She'd found it hanging on the front door, with a dollar bill pinned on the inside, out of sight, to pay for the service—a very odd way of leaving something to be laundered. I wondered what Dai would make of it.

Above the main floor of the laundry were the company offices, a break room with a compact kitchen for the employees, and restrooms. Evaporative air coolers brought the temperature down to more tolerable levels. There was also a private chamber where Dai or her mother might freshen up or change after delving into the heat and the humidity downstairs. Having carried a change of clothes and a hand towel, I was soon back to a more presentable state.

Dai exited wearing a silk afternoon dress in light blue, with puffed sleeves and a belted waist, as well as white day gloves trimmed with lace. A wide-brimmed white hat with blue trim would deflect notice of her silver eyes and foreign heritage, even as it got hinted at with a Chinese collar on the frock rather than the typical large ones popular at the moment. Prince's dog collar matched Dai's colors.

Unlike Prince, I wasn't made to coordinate; I was more than happy in my double-breasted light gray chauffeur's uniform.

With our wrapped parcels in hand, we descended to the back of the building where our car—a 1930 Ford Model A Town Sedan, in brown and black—waited for us. The car sat to the side, out of the way of the loading dock. I settled the packages in the trunk that was attached to the rear of the vehicle, then helped Dai into the back seat. I drew the curtains over the windows to afford her some privacy; sadly, the view of the city and the lovely drive from Oak Cliff were always lost to her.

"So, where are we headed?"

"The Old Red Courthouse, if you please. South Houston Street."

Did she really intend to contact the justice of the peace?

A soft chuckle echoed from the back. "I can hear the wheels in your head spinning, Jacques. Should I take pity on you? Or make you wait to find out what I'm up to?"

A glance in the angled side peep mirror showed her reclining, her expression a contented cat's. "Whichever you deem the most appropriate will be fine, Dai." The Ford rattled to life, its twenty-four-horsepower engine eager to roll out onto the street.

"Jacques, sometimes you aren't any fun at all." She pulled a small fan from her clutch and snapped it open with a flick of her wrist.

"As you say." I tried to hide a grin as we merged into traffic.

She tapped her window with her fan, vying for my attention. "We're going to see the justice in the hopes of finding a body."

"A body? Why would we be looking for a body? And why would the justice have one?" What mad errand was she sending us on?

Dai ignored my first two questions, only answering the third. "In Texas, unlike most other states, the duties of the coroner are entrusted to the justice of the peace. With any luck, he called in a doctor to examine the deceased before making a pronouncement. Better still if the judge requested an autopsy."

My eyebrow rose, wondering where the devil she'd picked up that bit of information. She was like a sponge where facts were concerned. It always amazed me what details she could glean that I did not, despite my being ever at her side. Perhaps the fact that she was blind—and thus not distracted by visual input—was responsible, but I doubted it.

I did wonder why she decided not to enlighten me on the reason she thought there was a body involved. Still, I recalled how dark the stain from the Marsh test was. Might that be why she believed this was an indication of foul play?

Traffic lumbered along, heavy even in late mid-morning. Though you might still spot the occasional horse-drawn cart or carriage, it was steel horses that ruled the roads of Dallas. The smell of their exhaust thickened the sultry air. But it was the scent of progress, of the future—of a city thriving despite the financial hardships hitting harder elsewhere. Wildcat wells and "black gold" erupting from the ground had people and businesses descending on the town, and they brought jobs and money with them.

The downtown Dallas courthouse reigned over its corner like a medieval castle. Built in 1892, its gray base and red stone walls rose over the site of four previous courthouses. Unlike its predecessors, which had all burned to the ground, the magnificent building looked as if it might easily weather even the worst Texas tornadoes.

With a bit of luck, I was able to park near the primary entrance. I helped Dai from the back, and with my hand tucked at her elbow, steered her toward the building. Prince Razor watched from the rolled-down back window, keeping guard over the car. Using a code we'd come up with as children, I tapped the inside of Dai's arm to make her aware we were about to reach a small set of stairs. Another tap alerted her that we'd reached the first step, warning her to raise her foot to climb it.

In a quiet voice, I described what was before us. It was a duty I'd managed for many years, a way to make my eyes her own. It allowed her to create a mental image of what she couldn't see for herself.

The tall stone, the rounded archway, and the gloom within increased the fanciful impression that we were entering a castle. Once through the large wooden doors with the stained glass lunettes, however, the romantic notion vanished as if it had never been. We'd entered a world of chaos.

Men in business suits mingled with others wearing cowboy hats, jeans, and boots. Texas twangs clashed with genteel accents. Everyone had a purpose, a drive, and they all aimed to get their business done before anyone else.

We stepped into the throng, and I used my body to shield Dai from those too rude to watch where they were going.

After inquiring with a guide in the lobby, I discovered the place we sought was on the second floor. Searching for an elevator or a set of stairs, we followed the crowd looking to obtain or renew permits, lodge claims, or yell out complaints. I'd heard that the courthouse had once

flaunted a large cast-iron staircase, but that it was removed years ago to create more office space. The stairs I found were narrow and zig-zagged upward. Still trying to shield Dai as much as possible, I led the way up. Throughout, she said nothing, and I had no time to even glance in her direction. There were too many elbows and arms moving every which way.

Once we were off the second-floor landing, the chaos eased a bit. There appeared to be courtrooms and offices on this level. I steered her to a bench nearby.

"Dai, are you all right?" I kneeled before her, looking for any sign that she'd been hurt. Her cheeks were flushed, but she seemed otherwise unharmed.

"Yes, I'm fine." Her teashade glasses had slipped during the hurried climb up the stairs, and she pushed them further up her nose to set them right. "Just a little more exciting than I was expecting, to be sure."

"Why don't you wait for me here? I can track down the correct office and make inquiries for you."

A hint of a smile came and went. "That's very sweet of you to suggest, but also highly impractical. While I have my proof of residency papers, it wouldn't do to leave a young lady unattended in such a public place."

I felt my neck heating in embarrassment. Of course—she couldn't be left here alone. If Prince Razor were with her, it might not be as worrisome, but I shouldn't forget this was a government office. Anyone here could question her presence once they realized she was a foreigner. The Geary Act had placed even more stringent restrictions on Chinese immigrants, a roundabout way of battling the increasing popularity of opium in several major cities. Illegal residents faced a year of hard labor before deportation, and there were plenty of unscrupulous men who were willing to use the law to destroy others. It was the reason I carried duplicate copies of her residency papers on my person. "My apologies. I should know better."

"Don't worry about it. I know your heart is in the correct place." She rose to her feet, her head tilted at a slight angle. "I think if we go this way, we're likely to find what we're looking for."

As usual, she was right. A corridor to the left led to a series of offices which were cut off from entry by a half door. The sign hanging from the ceiling designated the area as belonging to the justice of the peace.

"Pardon me, sir," Dai said. "We have something of a unique inquiry—I wonder if you might help us?"

The middle-aged man sitting at a desk just beyond the split door, as if guarding the offices beyond, glanced up in surprise. Between her tiny figure, dark glasses, and ribboned hat, I was certain she was a better sight than most of those who sought to talk to him. I filled the space behind her to be sure he was aware of my presence.

"Why, I suppose I could, depending on what it is you want to ask about, miss." He seemed intrigued, studying each of us.

"Thank you." She flashed him a smile. "In carrying out his duties, to whom would the justice turn for medical advice on the recently departed?"

The man's eyebrows rose. "Why in the world would you be wanting to know that?"

His reaction was pretty much what I expected. "Sir, it's a private matter," I said. "But my mistress would appreciate an answer all the same."

"Well, being as I'm the constable in this district, I'm thinking 'private' won't cut the mustard after a question like that one." He stepped closer to the half door, his gaze more piercing than before.

"You must be George Higgins, then. This is your third term as the precinct's constable, I believe?"

The man's jaw dropped. He moved up to the entry. "How would you be knowing that?"

"I have an interest in many things, Mr. Higgins. Being civic-minded is but one of them. It's hard to know whom to turn to if you don't know who your leaders are."

"You're a foreigner!" This close, he finally noticed the color of her skin and the slight tapering of her eyes behind the glasses.

"Yes, I'm afraid so. Despite the fact that I've lived here all but a few months of my twenty-one years. Unfortunately, Thomas J. Geary made sure we wouldn't have the choice, as so many other immigrants do, to become an American citizen."

To my amazement, the constable seemed taken aback by Dai's barrage of information.

"I meant no offense, miss." He held up his hands as if that would support his sincerity. "I just never seen a Chinaman before. It plumb took me by surprise. You don't even have an accent."

Dai tilted her head. "There are a lot fewer Chinese in Dallas than there used to be. Being called the 'Yellow Menace' tends to make us feel unwelcome." She gave him a dimpled smile. "Skin color means nothing to me. Blindness destroys certain barriers."

The constable's face crumpled in on itself. "Dang, girl! Not all of us believe that rot." He threw me a look as if asking for help. "Just give me a reason, and I'll tell you what you want to know."

I could sense Dai metaphorically circling to home in for the kill.

"I expect I have information that would assist in the investigation of a murder. Being a woman and part of the Yellow Peril, I am by law unable to bear witness in court. But as my intelligence is rather technical, I wished to share my findings with whomever the justice goes to for such matters, so they can bring up the scientific evidence we accidentally came across."

The poor man's jaw was hanging again. "Dang! I give. You win!" He shook his head. "Nobody will ever believe any of this, anyway. You'll want to talk to Dr. Aiden Campbell at Baylor Hospital." He shook his head again. "Now git. Go on!"

"Many thanks, Constable."

I sent the man a commiserating look, then steered Dai back the way we'd come.

"That was rather much, wasn't it?"

She barked a laugh. "He's an elected official. When else would I get a chance to give voice to the shackles that bind me and others? As if being blind weren't enough of a handicap."

"Still..."

She gave a small nod. "I'll try to behave myself. I promise. But you have to admit it did the trick, did it not?"

I said nothing, knowing that acknowledging it would only encourage her. Besides, we were almost at the bottom of the stairs. I needed to concentrate on getting her safely past the walls of men moving back and forth below.



## CHAPTER 3

When we reached the relative safety of our Town Sedan, Dai brought out a laced fan to cool her face while Prince Razor licked her neck and nuzzled her shoulder. "I'm all right, Prince. Just too many people. The smells and sounds were a little overwhelming. You wouldn't have liked it at all."

Of that, I was sure. 'Razor' would have appeared and ankles and legs felt the bite of his sharp canines at every turn. That was the main reason we had left him behind.

Motoring through part of downtown and Deep Ellum to Junius Street, we reached Baylor Hospital in short order. A white, stately building in the form of an E, it was one of Dallas' progressive leaps regarding health care for the masses. We left the windows open and a small dish of food and water on the floorboards for Prince Razor, who remained in the car—a condition he protested until she gestured for him to be silent.

After carefully taking charge of our packages, I led Dai into the facility to search for Dr. Campbell. While the constable had been effortlessly overwhelmed, I wasn't sure Dai would achieve the same with the pathologist.

A query at reception sent us off to the hospital's laboratory area. Though small, the amount of equipment was impressive. It made Dai's homemade lab in the dark basement of the laundry look like the workings of a child playing pretend. I was glad she couldn't see it.

"Excuse me. We're looking for Dr. Campbell?"

Two of the three technicians working there ignored our presence. The third waved us down the hall without ever taking his attention from his microscope. "Basement. The morgue entry is in Room B301."

Dai took a deep breath as we walked away. "The smells coming from that lab are fascinating, Jacques. We must come back another time. Spend a while there."

Only she would find such a thing interesting. I'd preferred not to take the risk of catching whatever illnesses they might study there.

"Pathology started as the study of diseases, but it's been branching out to encompass a lot more. Since they examine organs, tissue samples, and cells, their objectives have extended to doing autopsies to determine the cause of death. It would be an enthralling line of research."

Dai could do an abundance of things, but even she wouldn't be able to manage either pathological work or performing autopsies, no matter how much she might want to. Not that she ever admitted to having limits.

The basement's hallways were spacious, allowing for multiple people to wheel through at a time. From the signs hanging over several doors, this level appeared to house equipment like x-ray machines or devices used for rehabilitation, and even some operating theaters. I wondered how many patients had been brought here, not realizing they were sharing the floor with the dead.

We entered Room B301 through an innocuous enough door. The tiny office area had a desk and several clipboards on hooks on the wall. Beyond was a set of double doors with small windows. A bit of mist escaped from the bottom of the new entryway. It swirled away as the escaping cooler air met the warmer, more humid atmosphere of the living. The office was empty, so we bravely walked forward into the realm of the recently deceased.

The room beyond was broad. White glared from the walls and the tiled floor at our feet. Metal tables and a wall of refrigerator-type doors with holders for small index cards sat in the back. The odors of strong cleanser and decay tainted the air. Dai removed a lace handkerchief from her clutch to place over her nose. If even *I* found the odors unpleasant, Dai's enhanced sense of smell would make them altogether repulsive.

Harsh lighting brought everything into sharp relief, including the fellow standing over the exposed body of an older woman. I averted my gaze even as I continued to describe what I saw to Dai.

"He's short, blocky, with a rugged face. Close-cropped brown hair." I dared another look, avoiding the cadaver on the table. "He's now frowning at me."

"A man, you say? Curious..." It wasn't a word she used often.

"Who are you? You shouldn't be in here." The person I assumed to be Dr. Campbell grabbed the folded sheet at one end of the autopsy table and threw it over the woman's corpse, hiding it from view. Campbell's frown deepened as he moved in front of the table as if to shield the body from us. I couldn't help but wonder what he thought we'd want it for.

"I'm sure you've heard that often, Dr. Campbell," Dai said. "Even in these modern times, so many are still prejudiced without substance."

The doctor's frown deepened even more, this time peppered with a flicker of confusion. "What do you mean?"

Dai tilted her head. "Oh, I think you know."

The fellow's scowl turned into a glare. "You need to leave. This area is for authorized medical personnel only."

"So, you'd allow a murderer to go free?" Dai's tone was that of an innocent babe's.

"Explain yourselves, or I will throw you out. Bodily, if I have to."

Unasked, I stepped forward and set the packages I'd brought on the nearest metal table. Once I'd unwrapped the gown and the burned bowl, I moved back to Dai's side, leaving the items for Campbell's inspection.

"I've been told you assist the justice of the peace with autopsies on unexplained deaths," Dai said. "After finding that dress and performing a Marsh test on it, it's my conclusion that it was recently used to murder someone by arsenic poisoning."

"The Marsh test... you?" The doctor glanced at the dress and the bowl but had yet to make a move toward them.

"Surely you, of all people, wouldn't form presumptions based purely on appearances."

Aiden Campbell's rugged face grew hard. "You're blind, so I'm basing my statements on facts."

Dai laughed with clear pleasure. "Blunt and to the point. I like that!" Then her expression turned serious. "I knew there was arsenic on that dress the same way I know you're a woman."

A loud gasp echoed through the room. A moment later, my neck grew hot as I realized the sound had come from me.

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## OTHER WORKS BY GLORIA OLIVER

### SCIENCE FICTION



#### **Alien Redemption**

*What if the savior was the one who needed saving?*

All Claudia wanted to do was escape the mistakes of the past and start over. But when she answers an ad for a medical officer on a merchant ship in the Fringes, the captain recognizes her and blackmails her into taking the job.

The Holiday's Captain Bennet is amoral and has a short fuse. Claudia steers clear of him as much as possible while trying to care for the crew he lashes out on. Then the rumors start that their latest mission is to a location Bennet won't even share with the pilot.

The secret coordinates take the ship and crew to an uncharted system in the Fringes. To a planet that holds intelligent life, and despite the odds, also a humanoid one.

Bennet plans to use these aliens to climb up the power ladder at the borders of the Dominion. Even if it means placing the Avians into brutal servitude for the rest of their lives.

Can Claudia stop the impending exploitation of this newly discovered sentient species all on her own? Or is there a worse fate than blackmail waiting for her if she tries?

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[Sample Chapters](#)

### FANTASY



#### **Inner Demons**

*It took everything from her, except revenge!*



One moment I am sitting down to a cup of tea; the next, I'm on a dark street with a set of headlights coming right at me.

Not only am I not where I'm supposed to be, but I have three months of missing time. In that period, I ruined my best friend's wedding, blackmailed my boss, turned my back on my family and heritage, and worse.

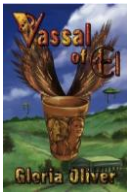
I'm sure I've lost my mind until I meet Jensen White, an ex-priest who proves to me I am not insane. He shows me I was possessed by a demon—one who used and discarded me like so much garbage.

Plus, it appears it did so with a purpose. So I'm tracking the thing to find out how and why it did this to me. Then I'll make the ones responsible pay!

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[Sample Chapters](#)



**Vassal of El**

*Torn between two worlds, will he be able to save either of them?*

Torren wanted nothing more than to forget his past and endure the life it had forced upon him. One small, begrudging act of kindness, however, embarks him on a path that will bring him face to face with everything he has so heartily attempted to avoid.

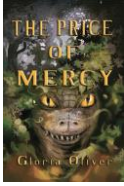
In so doing, events that seemed to have no bearing on his old life now appear to be tangled with it and his present.

Caught between the world of his birth and the one he currently lives in, will Torren be able to set aside his hate and guilt long enough to keep both from utter destruction?

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## **The Price of Mercy**

*Which is worse...the monster within or without?*

Wooing a new patron at the emperor's ball had been Jarrin Lestrave's only hope after being discarded by the Baroness. He finds the perfect subject, but in the end, he doesn't follow through on his plans. Yet the next day he discovers he's been marked a traitor to the realm-for defiling the emperor's daughter. Something which he did not do.

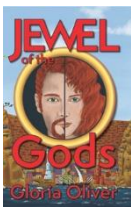
The Twelve, the emperor's secret guard, are sent after him. And when they catch him, they do not kill him. A worse fate has been set aside for him. He is to lose his humanity and become enslaved to the empire for eternity.

Then he meets his accuser-Princess Yolandra. As he battles with his rising hatred and the invisible chains thrust upon him, he begins to see that all is not as it seems-his fate tied to the possible return of the madness which once before decimated the world around them.

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## **Jewel of the Gods**

*Long Live the King! But will he?*

When fate sends Red and his crewmates to the coveted port of Syrras, it is an opportunity he plans to take full advantage of. Unfortunately, his search for a little adventure hands him a lot more than he ever bargained for.

Changed by unknown magics into something other than himself, he's told a terrible secret. One he must now help protect, even as he is tasked to find those responsible. Failure will cost him his body, his way of life, everything that makes him who he is.

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## YOUNG ADULT



### **In the Service of Samurai**

*The choice: Serve the undead or become one of them.*

Toshi never expected the strange visitor who one evening stepped foot inside his master's shop – a samurai smelling of the sea, with water dripping on the ground, and algae strung from his armor. For the first time in his life, Toshi discovers that monsters do roam the earth. And this one has been specifically looking for him.

Dragged from his home and all he has ever known, Toshi has no choice but to help the creatures who've taken him. Yet at every turn there are problems. And there are some who seek to terminate his life, for they've no wish to see his new master succeed in his assigned task.

But when they do find it, Toshi discovers his master's enemies have prepared for their eventual arrival, leaving him the only one capable of recovering what has been lost. Can he do what even the undead cannot? Or will he fail and be forced to wander the world for eternity as one of them?

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[Sample Chapters](#)



### **Cross-eyed Dragon Troubles**

*Talia didn't want to be apprenticed, not even to the prestigious Dragon Knight's Guild.*

She's taken to the school by a cross-eyed dragon and his partner, Kel. A dizzying, madcap ride which leaves her less than eager to be a knight, but soon she finds out the guild needs many types of people. Running into the dragon and squire again and again, she comes to realize the unlikely pair are outsiders in their own school. They were participants in the dragon-human pairing ritual, but it didn't work quite as intended. They are also stubborn loners, determined to overcome the obstacles in their path and make a proper pair. Or are they?

As Talia's first year at the guild evolves, she must deal with the Administrator's quirks, her lessons, the growing mystery of Clarence and Kel, and somewhere in there, possibly decide what it is she wants for her future.

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### **Willing Sacrifice**

*To save the world, she must die! Or must she?*

For as long as she can remember, La'tiera has known her purpose, her destiny. As the Bearer of the Eye, she will wait until the appointed time then sacrifice herself to the demons so the lands will be safe.

Yet as the time approaches, she is snatched from her home by strangers and is told it is for her protection. These strangers tell her she is not to be a sacrifice but must fight to live in order for the world to be saved.

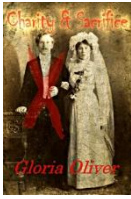
La'tiera will not be swayed, however, her duty clear. Despite their clever lies, she will follow through on her destiny and do what is required. Her every effort will be put to freeing herself from her kidnappers and meeting her fate as planned.

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## HORROR/ALTERNATE HISTORY



### **Charity and Sacrifice** (Novelette)

*Trapped in a loveless marriage, will Elizabeth's sacrifice to regain Robert's attention be in vain?*

All Elizabeth hoped to do was to rekindle the love in her marriage. Yet despite ignoring her social obligations and immersing herself in her husband's important work, somehow this only made things worse.

Her last hope is her unborn child — a source of unrequited love to fill the void inside her. But that too is taken from her. How? Why?

Her doctor avoids her. Her husband berates her. And there are whispers — whispers telling of things that cannot be.

Yet the more Elizabeth ignores the rumors, the more they press on her to seek the truth, so she concocts a plan to find it. To find it and hopefully exonerate both Robert and herself. To discover the reason she's lost all that's dear to her. And she will do it, even if she must venture into Whitechapel to do it.

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[Excerpt](#)



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gloria Oliver lives in Texas making sure to stay away from rolling tumbleweeds while bowing to the never-ending wishes of her feline and canine masters. She works full time shoveling numbers around for an oil & gas company and squeezes in some writing time when she can.

“Black Jade” is Gloria’s first cozy historical mystery novel. This is also her ninth book to see publication. Her previous works have been fantasy, urban fantasy, science fiction, and young adult fantasy novels. Several contain romantic and mystery elements. Her short stories of speculative fiction can be found in all manner of anthologies, covering things from the fantastic and strange to a Bubba Apocalypse.

Gloria is a member in good standing of BroadUniverse though she has yet to make the list for Cat Slaves R Us.

For some free reads, novel related short stories, sample chapters, appearance schedules and more information on her and her works, please drop by and visit her at [www.gloriaoliver.com](http://www.gloriaoliver.com)

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