



A  
Robert Forsythe  
Mystery

# A Death For A Dancing Doll

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E.X. Giroux

Author of A DEATH FOR A DOUBLE  
and A DEATH FOR A DREAMER

Our nearest and dearest are  
sometimes the deadliest....



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A DEATH  
FOR A  
DANCING  
DOLL

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藏书

E. X. Giroux

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**A DEATH FOR A DOUBLE**

**This book is for Marjorie  
and for my brother,  
Gordon Limbert Giroux**

## CHAPTER ONE

UNDER NORMAL CIRCUMSTANCES, ROBERT FORSYTHE possessed an even temperament and exercised courtesy and patience, but the present circumstances were hardly normal. He was suffering from a combination of jet lag, indigestion, and pain. The flight from Heathrow in London to the Vancouver International Airport had been unpleasant. He had dozed fitfully, had eaten little, and his bad knee, injured years ago in prep school, had stiffened up so badly that he needed the support of the cane on which he was leaning. His secretary, Abigail Sanderson, although many years his senior, was in better shape and was managing to be polite to the manager of the Vancouver Harmony Hotel. The manager's name was Malone, but he had a Gallic nature and couldn't appear to speak without arm and hand motions. If Miss Sanderson had been free to keep her distance from him, it might have been tolerable, but in an elevator crowded with her employer, two bellhops, and a mound of luggage, she was shoved against Malone's sizable paunch. She noticed enviously that Forsythe had managed to work loose of the pack and was standing in front of her, silently and morosely glaring at the elevator door.

To her relief, the elevator drew to a smooth stop, the doors slid back, and she stepped into a spacious foyer. Forsythe, without glancing around, limped toward rather impressive

double doors, waited for a bellhop to unlock them, and disappeared into the suite. Malone flung out a hand, hit her handbag with it, and said anxiously, "Mr. Forsythe seems in a bad mood. Have I done anything to offend him? Mr. Harmon's orders were to extend all courtesies to Mr. Forsythe and, of course, to you."

Bad mood is an understatement, Miss Sanderson thought. Robby has been acting like a bear with a sore paw and Mr. Malone, if anything, had been too fulsome with his courtesies. Of course, it was to the manager's professional advantage to make them happy. Robby not only was Mark Harmon's friend but was also a guest in the penthouse suite of the owner of the Harmony Hotel chain. She managed a reassuring smile. "Robby's simply exhausted, Mr. Malone. It was a long flight and his bad leg stiffened up. About ten hours sleep and he'll be in fine fettle again."

"I could send the hotel doctor up to—"

"No. Not necessary." She held out a dismissive hand. "Thank you."

His large hand engulfed her slender one and he retreated to the elevator while she moved into the hall of the suite. Directly in front of her was an archway, and long halls led both to the right and left. The bellhops were patiently waiting near the wheeled racks of luggage. The shorter one flashed a smile and asked, "Would you like to select your bedrooms, ma'am?"

"How many are there?"

"Four bedrooms." He jerked his head. "And four baths."

Ye gods, she thought. She fished in her handbag, extracted her wallet, and handed him a bill. "Stick the cases in any two of them and leave the keys on that table."

The archway led into an enormous living room with the rear wall entirely of glass. A door had been slid open and she spotted Forsythe on the patio, leaning against the parapet, sunlight glistening on his smooth hair. She joined him and gazed down at the city and then lifted her eyes to the rugged crests of mountains silhouetted against the northern



sky. "Marvelous setting this city has, Robby. Looks like a precious gem."

He grunted. "May look like a gem, but Vancouver is merely another city suffering from crime and drugs and general mayhem."

"Blimey, but you're a little ray of sunshine and good humor today! Keep on like this and you're in a fair way of ruining the beginning of a much anticipated and much needed vacation."

"Sorry, Sandy." He turned to face her. "Put it down to jet lag. Physically, I feel like midnight and it's barely afternoon. A drink may be in order. Located Mark's bar yet?"

"Haven't even located a bathroom yet, but that should pose no problem. The bellhop tells me there're *four*."

He grinned. "Wouldn't have done any good if you had looked. Mark keeps his liquor supply well hidden. Before we left London, he rang me up and told me the important things. The bar's location and where the keys for the cars would be."

"Cars? Meaning more than one?"

"One for each of us. A Mercedes and a BMW for our use while we're in residence in this palatial penthouse."

"I'm impressed. Tell me, just how long have you and Mark Harmon been buddies?"

"We're only acquaintances. Mark is a friend of Jennifer's and we met when I was visiting her in Los Angeles last spring."

"He must have taken a fancy to you. Offering the use of this place and his cars anytime you wish and for as long as you want to stay."

Forsythe's face sobered. "More like gratitude. I did Mark a service, Sandy. His young sister had got into a mess and I managed to extricate her."

Miss Sanderson stared at him. "You never mentioned it."

"Doesn't bear talking about. Sordid business and the girl was barely sixteen."

"Apparently what they say about casting bread upon water does come true occasionally. Lead on to the booze, Robby."

He stepped back into the living room. "What's your opinion of the decor?"

She cast a critical look around. "Shows the skilled hand of an interior decorator, expensive and with about as much personality as those room groupings they used to put in department-store windows."

"The type of room where one is nervous of spilling ash or disturbing a cushion. Let's hope Mark's library is cozier. Wonder where it is? Let's try that door near the fireplace. Ah, now that's more like it."

"Looks like our host might have taken a hand in this himself." Miss Sanderson gazed around. The library wasn't much smaller than the living room, but it had a feeling of warmth and comfort and ease. Walnut paneling covered the walls, handsome carpets glowed against oak floors, the bookshelves had glass fronts, and leather and brass predominated. She frowned. "No sign of a bar, Robby."

He laughed and limped around behind the desk. "Mark said there's a brass button here and all you do is press and . . . voilà!"

A walnut panel slid silently back and disclosed a lighted recess complete with a short marble counter and rows of bottles, decanters, and a multitude of various-sized glasses faithfully duplicated on mirrored shelves.

"Blimey! An alcoholic's paradise." She slid behind the counter. "What's your pleasure?"

"Laphroaig, and make it a double."

Miss Sanderson splashed whiskey into glasses and handed one to Forsythe. He sank into the custom-made chair behind the desk and his secretary wandered across the room to the fireplace. She inspected her image in the oval mirror over the mantel and smoothed gray waves back from her brow. Her hair looked fine but her long, austere face was as drawn and weary as her employer's. The room was warm and she slid off her green linen jacket. No doubt there was air conditioning, but she didn't suggest using it. Forsythe loathed artificially cooled air. She turned to look at him. Mark's chair could have been designed with Robby's long, slender, ele-

gant frame in mind. "Tweed seems a bit warm for mid-July in this area, Robby."

He rubbed a tweed-clad knee. "Heat doesn't bother me, Sandy; it's the cold that raises hob with this ruddy knee."

Her mouth snapped open to mention she had been urging he have that knee operated on for years, but she reconsidered—hardly the time or place. Instead, she said, "Nice of Gene Emory to urge we take three whole months for our vacation. I could hardly believe our luck."

"We both needed it, Sandy." He took a sip of his drink. "But when I told you that Gene and his partner and I were considering combining our two practices, you didn't appear overjoyed. I thought you'd be jumping with joy. Not only a chance for more time off from the grind but also an opportunity to get out of those cramped old chambers you've been complaining about for years."

Sinking into a leather chair opposite him, she stretched long, shapely legs. "Getting rather set in my ways, I suppose. After all the years with your father, then with you, I was used to the firm of Forsythe, Forsythe, and Forsythe. It will take time to accept Forsythe, Emory, and Mertz. But I must admit having a real office instead of a cubbyhole sweetens the deal. When we go home, I'm going to get those furnishings out of storage that Aunt Rose gave me when she took off for Corfu. I've been longing to use that desk, those chairs, and that wonderful old Bokhara but couldn't squeeze them into my flat."

The barrister regarded his secretary with affection. Miss Sanderson had been much more than a good right hand to both his father and to himself. His mother had died when Forsythe was a toddler and his father had never remarried. His father and his secretary had raised the young Robert and she was the only mother he could remember. He finished his drink, debated whether to have a second, and decided against it. He contented himself with lighting his pipe. "Have you made plans for your vacation?"

She stretched luxuriously. "The first month and the last one are mine alone and I'm staying loose on them. But from

the middle of August to middle September, I have a number of duty calls to make: a brother in Idaho, an aged cousin in Seattle, a childhood friend in the Yukon. I'm looking forward to the Yukon. Shades of Robert Service and *The Face on the Barroom Floor*."

He grinned and puffed out a cloud of aromatic smoke. "Just make sure your face isn't one of them. Aren't you going to ask me about my plans?"

"No need to. The middle month you're spending with Jennifer Dorland in California, and I know you have a number of jade auctions—"

"Nothing so crass as auctions, Sandy. Collections where one wanders around staring covetously and writes amounts on discreet little cards and tucks them into—"

"The highest bid takes the coveted jade object, doesn't it?"

"Certainly."

"Then it's an auction."

"It is *not* like the usual auction." He glanced at the desk calendar. "The day after tomorrow, there's an estate showing I simply must attend. The star of the collection is Han dynasty." He stared raptly off into space. "Lady with Heavenly Peaches."

His secretary's mind was on another lady. "Jennifer's certain she will have that month free, Robby?"

"Positive. It wasn't easy, either. She's not only writing the script for the documentary but she's been asked to direct it, too."

Miss Sanderson's cool blue eyes glinted with pleasure. Next to Robert Forsythe, Jennifer was her favorite person. "You really should snap her up. Not only is she pretty but—"

"Jennifer is *not* pretty."

"Well, she is attractive and intelligent and witty."

He hammered the pipe bowl into an ashtray. "Might better leave the marriage counseling until this jet lag wears off. Right now, I might take a large bite out of your ankle."

She decided not to pursue the subject. Robby and Jennifer were in love and it was only their careers keeping them apart.

Best to change the subject. "What shall we do for the rest of the day?"

"I'm going to have a meal, soak in a hot tub, and fall into bed."

"And I shall emulate you. I'd better order up a meal from that gourmet kitchen Mr. Malone was babbling about."

He shook his head. "Didn't he mention our larder had been stocked?"

"Repeatedly. But—"

"Soup and sandwiches. I'll be cook, Sandy. If we order from room service, the manager may trot the meal up himself and do some more hand licking. Trying to gain more brownie points with Mark Harmon."

"You were frightfully rude to the poor chap. And I have a hunch Mark Harmon was only part of the manager's reason for being in awe of you. Mr. Malone might have read that article published in the American magazine a couple of months ago. Remember?"

"How could I forget?" He pushed his fingers through light brown hair. "'England's Contemporary Sherlock Holmes'! A mishmash of errors, exaggeration, and downright sensationalism." His lips relaxed into a faint smile. "You received honorable mention, too."

Miss Sanderson demonstrated her amazing memory. "'This modern Holmes,' " she quoted, "'has his Doctor Watson. Abigail Sanderson, the barrister's secretary, plays this role to the hilt. Miss Sanderson, a maiden lady in her mid-sixties—'" Breaking off, she snarled, "Mid-sixties, indeed! Off by ten years!"

"Which way, Sandy?" He dodged the cushion she tossed, and laughed. "Enough violence. I'll dig out the car keys, and to make amends, you may have your choice. Which will it be—Mercedes or BMW?"

"Mercedes," she said with no hesitation. "What's in the envelope?"

He tore open the envelope. "Communiqué from Mark Harmon."

"Oh, oh! Now we get the price tag for all these goodies."

"You have a suspicious mind." He scanned the letter. "Mark's simply extending a welcome. Refers us, quite unnecessarily, to Malone should we require anything and . . ."

"And what? Does he have another sister to rescue?"

"No. But there is an elderly woman—a friend of his mother's—he'd like us to speak with. Appears she's having a spot of trouble." He looked up. "Mark doesn't sound as though he's taking it seriously. Says he thinks it's all in her mind. If we need more information on Mrs. Rebecca Holly, he says to ring up George Barton."

"And just who is George Barton?" Miss Sanderson asked frigidly.

"The attorney for both Mark and Mrs. Holly."

"How cozy."

"Now who's being a ray of sunshine? Don't look so glum, Sandy. Might as well ring up the lady and get it over with. Probably I can solve her little problem with a call."

"Get your hand off that phone and stop being an optimist. Mrs. Holly will hustle right over here to tell all and we're not up to it. You can make that call tomorrow."

He snapped a salute. "Aye, aye, sir!" He reached for his cane and pulled himself up. "Now I'll keep my promise and heat up soup and cut some sandwiches."

"In a pig's eye you will! You'll have a hot tub and crawl into bed. I'll locate the kitchen and get the food."

"But—"

"No buts. When you're steadier on that leg, you can take over kitchen duties. I'll bring you a tray. Scoot!"

"Why do I sometimes feel as though I'm back in the nursery?"

"Because sometimes you should be."

He limped through the living room and paused in the hall. "Where is my bedroom, Nanny?"

"The bellhops carried the luggage that way. Don't bother unpacking. We'll get settled in the morning."

Forsythe turned down the left-hand hall and Miss Sanderson opened the doors lining the right-hand one. In quick succession, she discovered a broom closet, a storage room,



a utility room, a formal dining room, and, finally, a kitchen. She gazed around covetously: the kitchen of her dreams, including a breakfast nook, glass doors leading to a patio featuring a glassed-topped table and four rattan chairs ringed by a small garden of potted shrubs and flowering plants.

She cut sandwiches, and while the soup heated she stepped out on the patio and gazed down at the streets far below. As she looked, she thought of Robby's words about cities and knew he was right. Every city, no matter how lovely, had a Janus-like nature. Like the god of the portals, this wonderful place wore two faces, one all beauty and sunlight and charm, the other a horror of crime and violence. She devoutly hoped that Vancouver would not display its dark face to Robby or her.

## CHAPTER TWO

**F**ORSYTHE MADE THE CALL TO REBECCA HOLLY SHORTLY after breakfast, and before eleven the woman was seated in one of the leather chairs in front of Mark Harmon's desk. Forsythe was obviously feeling much better, his color was normal and the cane was not in evidence. Miss Sanderson, holding a notebook and pen, sat at the far end of the desk. She found she was intrigued with their visitor. Mrs. Holly had explained that she was in her seventies and was a semi-invalid, having suffered for years from a heart condition. She didn't look her age and she didn't look ill. She was tiny and her hair, piled high on a finely shaped head, was silver-white. Her skin was fine and smooth and her eyes were that shade described by novelists as gentian, a bright and unfaded blue. She was modishly dressed and on the lapel of her jacket a corsage of violets nestled. At first sight of the woman, Miss Sanderson had thought of lavender and old lace. She soon found her assessment was totally wrong. Rebecca Holly was not a sweet old lady. She had an acrid turn of speech and was able to discuss her problem with no signs of emotion.

Mrs. Holly was talking rapidly and Forsythe held up a hand. "You say your granddaughter died in a town called Hollystone. Was this place named after your family?"

"Partially. A Holly and a Stone founded the town. My family—I was a Holly by birth as well as marriage; my hus-

band was a second cousin—were merchants and businessmen. The Stones were teachers and artists and writers. Oddly enough, through the years the two families didn't intermarry. They dwindled in numbers until there were only a few Hollys left—my two sons, my granddaughter, myself. There is only one Stone—Harriet. She was a teacher and when she was nearly thirty, she married my older son, Kenneth, finally uniting the families.”

Miss Sanderson consulted her notes. “And Thalia Holly, your granddaughter, was the daughter of Kenneth and Harriet?”

“No. Kenneth and Harriet had no children. Thalia was the daughter of my younger son, Reggie.” Rebecca's lips relaxed in a tiny smile. “Reggie was the direct opposite of his older brother. I was fond of Reggie but I never could stand Kenneth. Reggie had no knack for making money but a wonderful ability for spending it.”

Forsythe raised his brows. “You speak of both your sons in the past tense. Are they dead?” She nodded, and he asked, “Why did you dislike your older son?”

“Because Kenneth had only one good point. He could make money. Even as a boy, he was in the image of my father-in-law. He was a drinker, a womanizer, and, when he was drinking, Kenneth enjoyed giving abuse—”

“Physical abuse?” Forsythe asked.

“He only beat Harriet once and that was shortly before he died, but there are many types of abuse. When he was drinking, Kenneth taunted his wife—sometimes before guests—about his other women, about Harriet's lack of physical attraction. I've no idea why Harriet married him. I won't pretend I like Harriet but I do respect her. During her marriage to my son, she put up with humiliation and abuse that no woman should endure. Many times I urged her to divorce him, but she kept saying, ‘He's only a child, Mother Holly, a little boy who has never grown up. When Kenneth sobers up, he's always so remorseful.’ ”

“How did your son die?” Forsythe asked.

“His own wicked excesses finally killed him. He was