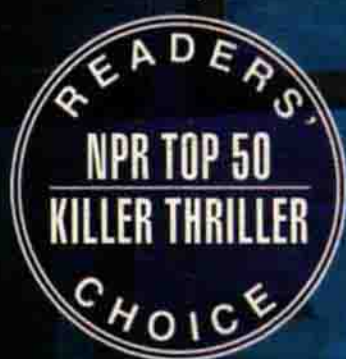


# TED DEKKER

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

## THE BRIDE COLLECTOR



“Absolutely the best  
beach read of the  
summer, the best  
late-night read  
of the fall.”

—*Examiner.com*



TED  
DEKker

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THE BRIDE  
COLLECTOR



CENTER  
STREET

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# READERS' CHOICE

## TED'S READERS SPEAK OUT ABOUT THE BRIDE COLLECTOR

There's a reason this book is in NPR's top fifty thrillers of all time. Dekker is known for his adrenalin-laced plots and incredible confrontations with good and evil, but this had something more. Something beautiful. Something eternal. —**Brandon Sneed**

Every now and then, a story comes along that stands at the edge of this chasm called human expectation...and laughs at it. This is one of those books. Drink deep of it and you'll find yourself gazing at the world through the eyes of the abnormal, the shunned, and the misunderstood. You may discover something stunningly beautiful and quiet possibly earth shattering but one thing is sure: it'll be a trip. —**Rebecca Moisio**

There aren't many novels that can hold my attention from cover to cover. The way Ted Dekker portrays the rawness of what it is to be a human being in *The Bride Collector* is sheer genius! A great read that will give the reader a new perspective of what is beautiful. —**Kenna Pruim**

Every book you read influences you in ways that you don't expect. However, there are rare exceptions where they completely change the way you think and look at the world. *The Bride Collector* is one such exception. —**Jamie Denham**

*Bride Collector* sucked me in from the first page and had me saying "one more chapter" until I finally finished it at 4 in the morning. You may think that it's impossible to get more intense.

—**Jessica McLean**

Part of the reason I read fiction is because someone else's observations have the capacity to impact forever the way I view the world. Dekker's are among the most unique I have ever read. *Bride Collector* was a parable wrapped inside a thrill ride. I made the decision a long time ago that not only did I want to read everything Dekker wrote, but I wanted to own them all, preferably in hardback!

—Teresa Jorgenson

I made the mistake of starting this book before a get together with friends. I spent the entire time in the car reading. I managed to put it down during the fireworks, mostly because I couldn't see. It grabbed me from the beginning and did not release its hold on me once. So powerful, so real.

—Sherri Neilson

A good book makes you think, but a great book challenges you to be something more than you already are. This is exactly what *The Bride Collector* does. The message of this book is so powerful that one gets the feeling that even Ted Dekker while writing it was only along for the ride. Don't get comfortable while reading this book, because you are going to want to do something about what you read!

—Deborah Kaiser

*The Bride Collector* is a perfectly coordinated attack on your heart and mind. It keeps you locked in with nail-biting suspense, fantastically complex and unforgettable characters, as well as a heart-wrenching story of love. Ted Dekker will satisfy every craving, and leave you shamelessly begging for more.

—Ross Chiasson

No author can put me on the edge of my seat, make me chuckle with delight, or bring me to the verge of tears like Ted Dekker can. *The Bride Collector* is no exception, and will surely be seen as one of the bright and shining stars of his work.

—Matt Tory



Ted Dekker has always been a film maker with a pen. He can turn your eyes into a camera lens and your mind into a reel of film. From start to finish *The Bride Collector* will make you feel every pain, here every scream, and see every horror. You better be ready for this because once you start, your mind will drag your body along for the ride!

—Reuben Lehman

I've never before read a novel that made me feel so beautiful. I've read everything Ted Dekker has written and "*The Bride Collector*" falls in my top five favorites of his books, not only because I couldn't put it down but also because of the emotions that were stirred while reading it. This is a must read for anyone who has ever felt less than beautiful.

—Melissa Klise

*The Bride Collector* blew my mind wide open, and exposed me to a subject that is so often avoided in our country. Not only does Dekker take you on a wild ride, but you are left with an overwhelming understanding and compassion for all those affected by mental illness. If you only read one book this year, this one has got to be it!

—Jennifer McGee

To capture your attention, your emotions, your every thought. That is what Ted Dekker has done in his mind opening novel, "*The Bride Collector*." Be prepared to enter the psyche of eccentrics, geniuses, and one of the most bone-chilling characters to ever walk the pages of a thriller.

—Joseph Parker

*The Bride Collector* raised a bar I had thought could not be raised any higher by an author who gets only better when such improvement should be impossible. Ted Dekker shows a superb grasp of the intricacies of both the mind and heart in this book, and this book will surely touch both in all readers. Bravo!

—Trey Weller

Ted Dekker continues to wow me. His stories paint an intimate picture of not only how close we all are to evil, but how close we all are to redemption. *The Bride Collector* is the perfect example of this. The raw emotion of love that defies all logic and has the potential to build up or destroy. The decision is yours.

—Andrew Lewis

*The Bride Collector* is a perfect composition for anyone who has ever caught themselves searching for a deeper side of beauty. Dekker has obviously mastered the ability to make the most fictional stories humanly realistic. You'll find yourself go from crying to laughing in one page.

—Rachel McNichols

The love expressed in *The Bride Collector* kept me reading page after page. Dekker continuously provokes intense feelings inside his readers that bond them with his characters. Readers are not simply reading, they are living inside the book.

—Alexis McKinnon

*The Bride Collector* is an amazing piece of literary work. Ted Dekker never ceases to shock and astound me, while pulling me so far into his stories that I cannot see my way out until the last page. This book was no exception. Thank you for another incredible story that will be on my mind and in my heart for a long time to come!

—Holly Manthey

*The Bride Collector* is a chilling look at how the potential for darkness lurks in each of us, and a rare chance to fully examine our own actions: although intentions can be for Good, what is produced is for Evil.

—Jenice Neufeld

*The Bride Collector* was my first experience into the world of Ted Dekker, and I didn't want to leave. Never before has a suspenseful masterpiece left me pondering ideas in my own life; Dekker has the power to seamlessly weave the two together into a page turner that you won't want to put down.

—Brandi Evans

Dekker weaves a heart-wrenching story of acceptance, tolerance, and love while epitomizing the epic battle between good and evil. Readers will be asking, "who succeeds and at what cost?" *The Bride Collector* has vividly portrayed characters so uniquely profound as to merit a marathon reading session.

—Shamra Haynes

Koontz and King have nothing on Dekker, they never made me cry. *The Bride Collector* is quite possibly the best piece of literature ever written.

—Nick Ramirez

This nail-biting page turner is not afraid to delve deep into the inner workings of the mind and soul. *The Bride Collector* is as much a story of love, beauty and redemption as it is the story of a psychotic serial killer out to destroy that which he feels he could never possess. Don't let Ted Dekker's easy to read style fool you; this book is profound in its exploration of what true love and forgiveness look like in the context of horrible circumstances. Definitely a "two thumbs way up!"

—Robin Owen

My expectations were once again blown through the roof with *The Bride Collector*. Just when you think Ted's writing is at the peak of perfection, he astounds you by going even deeper. I was captivated by the heart-gripping plot, but the characters absolutely rocked this story. Be prepared to fall in love when you pick up this one!

—Hope Johnson

In a world where so much of life is just lived on the surface, it's a rare thing to find someone who is not afraid to look deeper. *The Bride Collector* asks us the questions, "What is beauty?" and "What is mental illness, really?" and answers them in a wonderful story of love, loss and redemption. A must read if you are tired of "surface stuff"

—Todd Jenken

Every other book please take a step back in line. *The Bride Collector* is the most amazing suspense book ever.

—Kristen Lowery



*The Bride Collector* is so much more than just words and pages placed together. This novel will get under your skin, into your soul. Filled with suspense and brilliance, this story will turn you white. *The Bride Collector* will take you under. —**Breanna Sivil**

This is one of those rare, heart-pounding stories that won't weaken its grip on you until the end. Beauty, evil, love, hate; all of these subjects and more are expertly woven into a tale that could only be called, "*The Bride Collector*." Ted speaks volumes on how genuine beauty comes from within, and I truly believe this is a story the whole world needs to hear. —**Emily Dukes**

There are very few authors that can create extraordinary works that affect the five senses as Ted Dekker. *The Bride Collector* is no exception. As you read this story, you will be drawn into the world of mental illness, murder, and love. It is a story that will have you biting your nails to the end. —**Heather Pike**

I picked up *The Bride Collector* expecting another great Ted Dekker novel. Instead, I had my mind blown by one of his best! *The Bride Collector* kept me tearing through the pages, holding me breathless as every unpredictable twist came my way. As chilling as the best thriller, as sweet as any romance, *The Bride Collector* is by far the best thriller I've ever read! —**Ben Johnson**

*The Bride Collector* is a thrill ride through the best and worst of every human being. Dekker puts up a full-length mirror and makes you question who you really are. You won't want to put it down! —**Michelle Smith**

This book shares a powerful and tear-jerking message about beauty while scaring us so much we have to sleep with the lights on. Only Ted Dekker could accomplish all of this with one novel! —**Julie Moore**

Ted Dekker delivers yet another winner with "*The Bride Collector*." Clear your calendar, turn off your cell phone, and make sure your pantry is well-stocked. Once you pick up this page-turner, you won't want to put it down! It's. That. Good. Oh yeah, you might want to hide your drill.

—Naomi Hays

I've never read a thriller that pulled me so deeply into the character's hearts and minds. *The Bride Collector* is a roller-coaster ride of emotion and suspense, the action and romance executed with equal brilliance. Read it—because that excuse that just popped into your head isn't good enough.

—Ben Whiting

It doesn't matter if you have read Dekker before or not. *The Bride Collector* will grip you, squeeze you, and even after the last page is turned, it doesn't let you go. It is a powerful story, full of mystery and love. Truly one of Ted Dekker's greatest novels.

—Matt Stapleton

*The Bride Collector* is truly stunning and beautifully composed. It is everything a good book should be: haunting, thought provoking, and above all else enjoyable.

—Micah Jones

Ted Dekker is like a drug that gnaws at your mind until you finish the chapter and then the next one, and the one after that.

—Michael Miceli

Recommended to anyone BEGGING for a great thriller to keep them up for the next three days. Absolutely unforgettable. Truly a "Top 50 Best Thrillers Ever" pick.

—Joshua Rose

The words are moving, the characters are relatable, and his plot is unpredictable. No book has ever hit me the way *The Bride Collector* did, it cast a whole new light on beauty and thought.

—Saira Cunningham

**BOOKS BY TED DEKKER**

*Boneman's Daughter*

*The Bride Collector*

*Adam*

*Thr3e\**

**WINNER OF  
THE CHRISTY BOOK AWARD  
BEST MYSTERY THRILLER\***

# THE BRIDE COLLECTOR

# 1

"THANK YOU, DETECTIVE. We'll take it from here."

FBI Special Agent Brad Raines stood in the small barn's wide doorway and scanned the dimly lit interior. Dusk fell on an ancient wood floor covered in dust disturbed by numerous footprints. Shafts of light streamed from cracks in a sagging roof.

Long abandoned. A natural choice.

"With all due respect, Agent Raines, my team is here," the detective replied. "They can work the scene."

"But they won't, Detective Lambert."

Raines turned his head slowly, taking it all in.

One rectangular room roughly fifteen by forty, covered by a tin roof. Interior walls formed by six-inch graying wooden planks. Ten, twenty, thirty, thirty-two on the narrow side. Fifteen feet, as estimated. Two shovels and a pitchfork on the floor to his right. A single window with dirty, tinted panes, crowded by empty cobwebs.



A dust-covered wooden bucket rested in the corner, its rusted handle covered with filth. Several old rusted tin cans—GIANT brand peas with the label mostly missing, HEINZ canned hot dogs—scattered on the floor, left by campers long gone. An old plow blade lay against the near wall. An even older worktable sat to the left, near the far wall.

All unsurprising. All but what had brought Brad.

The woman's body was glued to the wall to his left, arms wide, wrists limp. Like the other three.

"... Chief Lorenzo for clearance." The detective's voice edged in on his thoughts. Lambert was still here.

Brad looked over his left shoulder where Nikki Holden, a leading forensic psychologist, stood staring at the woman's body with those wide blue eyes of hers. She caught his get-rid-of-the-cop glance and turned to face Detective Lambert. Brad returned his gaze to the shed's interior as she spoke.

"I'm sorry, Detective," she said in her most reasonable tone of voice, "but I'm sure you can appreciate our position here. Give my team a few hours. If this isn't our guy, you'll be the first to know. The police department's been more than helpful."

Brad looked up to mask his knowing grin. One of the rafters was cracked, and its gray husk revealed a lighter, tan core. Freshly broken.

"I don't like it," Lambert said. "For the record."

Brad pulled his eyes from the crime scene and smiled at the detective. "Thank you, Detective. Noted. There's quite a bit about this job not to like. If your men could secure the perimeter, that would be helpful. Our forensics team will be here any minute."

Lambert held his gaze for a moment, then turned away and addressed a man behind him. "Okay, Larry, cancel the forensics, this is now an FBI investigation. Tell Bill to secure and hold the perimeter."

Larry muttered a curse and flicked away a bit of straw he'd taken from a pile of old bales. A white unmarked van rolled over the yellow perimeter tape and slowly crunched over the gravel driveway. It had taken the forensics team an hour to reach the scene, just south of West Dillon Road, from the Stout Street field office in downtown Denver. A farm had evidently once occupied this empty field in Louisville, twenty-plus miles northwest from Denver up the Denver-Boulder Turnpike.

Brad glanced at Nikki. "Tell them to start on the outside," he said flatly. "Give us a minute. Bring Kim in when she arrives."

Kim Peterson, the forensic pathologist, would determine what the body could tell them postmortem. Nikki headed for the van without comment.

Brad turned his attention back to the small barn. The shack. The farm shed. The killer's nest. The rest of the story was here, in the dark corners. The walls had watched the killer as he'd methodically ended a woman's life. The worktable had heard his words as he confessed his passions and fears in a world turned inside out by his compulsions. It had witnessed her pleas for mercy. Her dying moans.

Careful not to step on the exposed markings in the dust, Brad entered the room and approached the wall on which the woman was affixed. He stood still, filtering out the sounds of voices from a dozen law enforcement personnel outside. The hum of rubber on asphalt from the main road

two hundred yards down the driveway settled in with the sound of his breathing. Both faded entirely as he brought his senses in line with the scene before him.

Her nude torso rose pale in the glow of a single light shaft. As though by magic, her body seemed perched on the wooden wall behind her, both arms stretched out on either side. Two round dowels that supported much of her weight protruded from the wall under her armpits. Her heels were together, each foot angled away from the other to form a V.

A white veil of translucent lace had been carefully arranged to cover her face, like a bride.

The outthrust posture sent a collage of art-history remnants cascading through his mind—the *Venus de Milo*, a thousand renditions of the Crucifixion, the Louvre's *Winged Victory* statue, her marble bosom jutting forward as if it belonged on the prow of an ancient ship plowing through a Mediterranean surf.

But this was no museum. It was a crime scene, and the mixture of cruelty and ostentation pouring from the garish exhibit filled him with a sudden wave of nausea.

Slowly, his analytical faculties began to reassert themselves.

She was naked except for thin cotton panties and the veil. Blond. White. Everything about the placement was symmetrical. Each hand was set in identical form, with thumb and forefinger touching, each shoulder, each hip had been carefully manipulated into perfect balance. All but her head.

Her head slumped gently to the left so that her long blond hair cascaded over her left shoulder before curling under her armpits. Through the veil he could see that her

eyes were closed. No blemish, no sign of pain or suffering, no blood.

Only blessed peace and beauty. She could as easily be an angel painted by da Vinci or Michelangelo. The perfect bride.

Brian Jacobs, seventeen, had brought his girlfriend here after school for reasons unrevealed and found the Bride Collector's fourth victim. Brad preferred to think of them as angels.

He peered closer and felt strange words of empathy well up inside of him.

*I cry with you, Angel. I weep for you. For every strand of hair that will never again blow in the wind, for every smile that will never brighten someone else's day, for every look of desire that will never quicken another man's pulse. I am so sorry.*

"She's beautiful," Nikki said behind him.

He felt a momentary stab of regret for having been pulled away from his connection with the woman on the wall. Nikki walked past him, eyes fixed on the woman, touching his arm gently with her fingers as she passed. Her breathing was steady, slightly thicker than usual. He knew the cause: the dark waters of the killer's mind, which she now probed by staring at his handiwork.

Like an avalanche, the poignancy of his relationship with Nikki crashed through his mind...and then was gone, replaced by the image of her standing next to the woman. A blond angel hovering over a brunette. One with arms stretched wide in complete resignation, the other with arms folded. One nearly naked, the other dressed in a blue silk blouse with a black jacket and skirt.

*She's beautiful,* he thought.