

**Excerpt Only**

**JOY TO THE  
WORLDS**



**MYSTERIOUS SPECULATIVE FICTION  
FOR THE HOLIDAYS**

**MAIA CHANCE, JANINE A. SOUTHARD,  
RAVEN OAK, AND G. CLEMANS**



**SEATTLE, WA**

# Excerpt Only

## MR. AND MRS. MISTLETOE

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BY MAIA CHANCE

Welcome to the retro-future, something different than the fairytale land in which Maia Chance usually resides. This is easily my favorite work of Maia's as it both pokes fun at several local neighborhoods while serving as cheeky social commentary on both gender roles and classism. Toss in the 1950's setting and you have a fabulous story reminiscent of *The Stepford Wives* and *Fallout*®. Spinsters always get a bad rap—or they did until Miss Pynn!

—Raven Oak



Spinsters always wear glasses—at least they do in the movies. As though eye-slackening bookishness were the outcome of a life without manly kisses.

I myself am a spinster, living out my days as Mistlehurst's town librarian in pilled wool and bunion-provoking shoes. And yes, I wear glasses. A cat eye pair, if you must know, my lone tribute to fashion. To all appearances I have nothing better to do on long winter evenings than curl up with my robotic cat—purr switch set to *Hearthside Rumble*—in front of my Nuclear Flame and knit booties for other ladies' babies.

And yet, with my glasses, I am able to *see*.



Paradoxically, at the moment my observational faculties were being recruited, Dr. Cornelius's examination room was a blur of steel and creamy green. I'd removed my glasses at the good doctor's request. They sat on a cart across the room.

"Your appetite, Miss Pynne, you say it has diminished?"

"Well, it has never been good." *You look like a washboard and a couple of broomsticks*, Mother tells me. "Lately, however, I find myself forgetting meals entirely."

"I see." Dr. Cornelius looked into one of my ears through a probe. His bushy white beard brushed my cheek; I held my breath. He checked the other ear. Then he pushed his probe into the breast pocket of his white coat. "You may sit up," he said, rolling away on his stool to the desk.

I clutched the examination gown to my chest as I struggled upright. For the first time, I noticed the mistletoe ball—blurry, of course—dangling by a red ribbon, well, not *quite* over the examination table, but close. How festive.

Dr. Cornelius's back was to me as he scribbled something on a pad. "You have come down with female proheteriariosis," he said without turning.

"I have? What...what is that?"

"The Victorians termed it hysteria" —Dr. Cornelius chuckled— "but of course they were mistaken about many things, foremost that it is not a disease of the womb but of the brain."

"I am not *hysterical*, Doctor. I have frequently heard the complaint, indeed, that I am *too* stable. Even when little boys run in the library, I do not—"

"Female proheteriariosis takes many forms, although its root cause is always the same." He swiveled to face me.

"It is?" Why didn't these medical gowns cover you up properly?

"Oh-ho, yes." Dr. Cornelius pointed at the mistletoe. "The cause of your disease, Miss Pynne, is that you're not a *Mrs.*"

"What is the cure?"

Dr. Cornelius ripped the prescription from his pad and passed it over. I couldn't read it without my glasses. "Three pills daily—you may cut them into quarters, as some find them difficult to swallow. Do not be alarmed by their pink

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hue. I should add that it is perhaps not too late, Miss Pynne, to harvest some of your ova and preserve them. Tremendous scientific discoveries have been made.”

“I am quite, *quite* happy as an unmarried lady, Dr. Cornelius.”

“Your health suggests otherwise. Miss Pynne—if I may—it would be wise to engage in pastimes outside of the confines of the library and the home—I understand you live with your mother?”

“Yes.”

“The Mr. and Mrs. Mistletoe Pageant is tonight—”

“I have plans.” A lie, but I’d rather stick a pickle fork in my cornea than attend *that* tribute to dental hygiene.

“I did not mean to suggest that you should *view* the pageant—I suppose you wouldn’t have anything to wear—it’s a formal event, you understand.”

“No....”

“However—well, as you know, I am a judge of the pageant each year—the people of this town seem to believe I have good judgment.”

“You’re a pillar of the community, Doctor. How many babies did you deliver in the past year?”

“Forty-two.”

“Goodness gracious, we’ll have to build a new school.”

“A small matter has come up that, perhaps, you would find diverting to assist me with. Will you assist me, Miss Pynne?”

“Well....”

“It is for your own good.”

“What is the task?” I could already taste the sour rubtex balloons and smell the atomo-perc coffee.

“The pageant scepter has been stolen.”

“Oh, dear me. Was it valuable?”

“What sort of question is *that*, Miss Pynne?” Dr. Cornelius’s cheeks turned a blurred cherry-red.

“Oh, I did not mean—”

“That scepter sits at the very center of everything Mistlehurst stands for—the New American Territories Dream! Prosperity, tradition, Christmas, *home*. At the end of each year, Mr. and Mrs. Mistletoe, a handsome, prosperous man and his beautiful wife, stand hand in hand together at the helm of Mistlehurst’s bright future. A future filled, not with subpars and limp morals and filth but with intelligent, well-proportioned families, all with beautifully-formed work ethics.” Dr. Cornelius was breathless. I dared not wipe away the fleck of his spittle that had landed on my cheek. “You do not talk much with the townspeople, do you, Miss Pynne?”

“In the library, we *whisper*—”

“You are too meek. Too eager to obey instructions. You keep quiet as a mouse, don’t you?”

I pictured the pot roast-shaped silhouette of my mother before the light of the megavision screen. *She* said I was too meek, too obedient, mousy.

“I do have Tykes’ Story Hour at three o’clock,” I said to Dr. Cornelius, “and I simply couldn’t miss *that*, but Mrs. Orville comes in to volunteer at the library this morning. She could surely look after things for a few hours, couldn’t she?”

“How seriously you take your little job at the library, Miss Pynne.”

“I will find your scepter, Doctor.”

“I hope you will. We cannot complete the pageant tonight without it.” Dr. Cornelius described how the six-year reigning Mrs. Mistletoe, Mary Chadwick of 151 Montcrest Avenue, had talkaphoned him just before my appointment that morning to report that the scepter had been stolen from her home. “I am extremely busy, Miss Pynne, and today no fewer than five women are due to give birth, so you finding the scepter, well, it will not only be helping *you*, it will be helping me, too.”

“One-fifty-one Montcrest Avenue,” I said. “Should I begin there?”

“Miss Pynne, I did not like to say it, but female proheteriariosis is a...well, it is a degenerative condition. If you are to slow its terrible tide, you must take charge of matters. Talkaphone me the moment you locate the scepter, please.” Dr. Cornelius left.

I wiped the spittle fleck from my cheek, hurried back into my glasses, dressed, and tidied my hair. I went out to the waiting room with its tank of rubtex Reel-Fish and walls thick with photographs of babies Dr. Cornelius had delivered. Newborn babies all look the same, don’t they?

At the desk, Miss Gint was occupied on the talkaphone. I waited patiently. I am an excessively patient lady. A red-ribboned ball of mistletoe dangled even here, as though poor Miss Gint would like to kiss every rashy, feverish, or decaying person who stopped at her desk.

I settled my bill and went outside onto Main Street.

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Such a discomfiting sensation, walking *west* along Main Street at this hour rather than east toward the library. A bubbling of glee coursed through me like champagne. I ignored it, as I am strictly a tap water lady. This wasn't playing hooky; this was for my health.

Salt gritted the sidewalks. Shop windows unfurled blankets of Kyndlyke-Snow, twinkling atomic lights, and shiny gifts. A big band "Jingle Bells" leaked out the post office doors. Women in coats and hats steered prams and led cherubic children by the hand and HooverPets by their leashes. Most of the women's husbands were miles away in the Suspended City office estate, which is treeless, bleak, and infested—so I have heard—with subpar encampments.

I left the prescription for my pills at Huxley Pharmacy and continued on. Soon I was walking up the gentle slope of Montcrest Avenue. Lawn ornaments—tasteful yet exorbitant, installed by workers, not husbands—cluttered every mock Tudor's yard. Reindeer, Santa Clauses, elves, candy canes, and angels, all glowing and pulsating in the wintry light. The Moores' yard boasted a red-and-white striped hot air balloon with Mrs. Claus in the basket. Slowly it floated up to rooftop height and down again.

Every thirty seconds or so a gleaming hovermobile whooshed past me, hover pads skimming the street, chrome mirroring bare trees and gray sky. Behind windshields I glimpsed frozen hairdos, mostly blond.

I hadn't mentioned to Dr. Cornelius that I knew what the six-year reigning Mrs. Mistletoe, Mary Chadwick, looked like. I knew what her husband, Merton Chadwick—a.k.a. Mr. Mistletoe—looked like, too. I had seen their blinding smiles on the front page of the *Mistleburst Gazette* year after year. Their eyes seemed empty until one realized that they were simply trying not to crinkle their crow's feet.

The Chadwick house was a bloated mock Tudor with latticed windows, one turret, and a two-hovermobile garage. A pearly Hover-Benz floated in the driveway. A Helper Hack with rubtex tires, not hover pads, was parked behind it.

I heard whooshing behind me and turned to see another Hover-Benz, this one fleshy pink, jolt to a stop. A mound of a woman in a white fur coat, scarlet lipstick, and pillbox hat got out. A clipboard protruded from her large handbag.

"You're the librarian, aren't you?" she said, marching over. "Miss Din? Why are you gawking at the Chadwicks' house?"

"I am Miss Pynne. And you are?"

"Why, Mrs. Glover—Betty Glover. Is Mrs. Chadwick delinquent on a library fine? Is that why you're here?" It sounded like a joke, but Betty's baby-blues were guileless, crisped at the edges with black mascara.

"I am here to look into a...matter."

"A matter?" The mascara crisps quivered. "What matter?"

"It is to do with the pageant—"

"*What?*" Betty's voice dropped an octave and she grabbed my arm.

"The Mr. and Mrs. Mistletoe Pageant. Dr. Cornelius asked me to help find—"

"The scepter."

"You know?"

"Of *course* I know. I am the pageant committee chairlady. Mrs. Chadwick talkaphoned me the very *minute* she learned it was gone." Betty dropped my arm and wobbled to the front door in her high heels.

I contemplated going back to the library. It was very nearly time for my hot water with lemon, you see, and Mrs. Orville, well, once I saw her *dog-ear a library book*. Yet there was something infuriatingly officious about this Betty person. I joined her on the front porch.

A holly wreath decorated the door. The holly was rubtex, not real, and at four-second intervals it released a *psssssssst* of woodsy perfume.

"Isn't that simply *lovely*," Betty said, her voice regaining a non-demonic register. "Makes me want to sing 'Joy to the World.'"

I hoped she would not.

The door swung open and Mary Chadwick appeared, blond-helmeted, almost-movie-star beautiful, in a white chiffon robe fluffed with marabou feathers. "Yes?" Mary made the same baby-doll blink that Betty had, and it was difficult to say who had executed it best. Mary's was prettier, but Betty's had been dumber.

"Mrs. Chadwick, it is I, Betty Glover—the chairlady of the pageant—you talkaphoned me earlier this morning?"

"Oh! How silly of me! I almost didn't recognize you. You were here only a few weeks ago at our little cocktail do."

"That's right. My husband, Mr. Glover—Bert—mixed you a pink squirrel, and both you and Mr. Chadwick said you'd never drunk one before and it was marvelous."

"Yes. Pink stains on the sofa cushions even now." Mary's white teeth glinted. "What can I do for you? I'm *terribly* busy with last-minute preparations for the pageant tonight."

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Mary had yet to acknowledge my presence, probably assuming I was some sort of drab clerical assistant. But Dr. Cornelius had asked *me* to look into the disappearance of the scepter. Not Betty. I said, “Mrs. Chadwick, I am here about the stolen pageant scepter.”

“*We* are here for—ah—*that*,” Betty said.

“Oh. I see. Who are you?”

“Miss Pynne.”

“Come in, then. I’ll show you where we kept it.”

Mary led us into the entry hall. A HooverPet buzzed toward us, yapping. It was a Corg-eez model, surprisingly, not a Dober-mince. Mary went up a curved staircase and Betty and I followed. Thankfully, the Corg-eez could not surmount the first step. Upstairs, everything was spic and span. The Chadwicks didn’t have children, according to the *Mistleburst Gazette*.

We entered a bedroom. Pink and orange roses bloomed on the drapes and the coverlets of two narrow beds. Betty gawked at the separate beds; I pretended not to see them.

“We kept it here,” Mary said, stopping at the cluttered vanity table. A rectangular glass box sat on a green velvet cushion. “Under there.”

“Not locked up?” I asked.

“No. Why would we? It isn’t even made of metal, let alone gold. It’s only rubtex.”

I nodded. The scepter always figured prominently in the *Mistleburst Gazette* photographs: a gold-tone staff topped with a red bow and a ball of faux mistletoe.

“Why does the glass box have little holes in it?” I asked. You could have kept a hamster alive under there.

“I don’t know, honestly,” Mary said. “To keep the rubtex from going soft?”

“Why don’t we discuss this downstairs?” Betty said with another anxious glance at the beds.

“Wait,” I said. “Isn’t there anything else you can tell me, Mrs. Chadwick?” I tried to recall the detective novels I’d read at the library. *Only*, mind you, to ensure that smut is kept out of my library. “When was the last time you saw the scepter?”

“Last night, when I was cold-creaming my face. I always look at the scepter while I’m preparing for bed. It soothes me. Why don’t we go downstairs?” Mary led the way out. Betty and I followed.

Downstairs, Mary billowed over in her robe to a drinks table in the living room. “What would you like?” she called.

Betty and I sat on a long, low white sofa.

“Nothing for me,” I said. Even fruitcake fumes are too much for me.

Betty eyed the pink stain on the cushion next to her. “Nor I,” she said.

Mary spun around and posed in front of the picture window, a clear drink in her hand. “All right. What else would you like to know? Be quick about it. I must hook myself up to the exercise machine soon, and then I must rest.”

“Do you believe the scepter was stolen during the night, or in the morning?” I asked.

Mary sipped her drink. “I swallow two Snorils every night, put on my eye mask, and pop in my ear plugs. I have no idea. We *do* keep the house locked tight, of course.”

Betty said, “The obvious culprit is the help, naturally.”

“That’s what *I* thought,” Mary said, “but I gave Dolores—my housekeeper—the morning off since I cannot *abide* the sound of her suction cleaner, and anyway, I never eat a bite on pageant day.”

“No one else entered the house?” I asked, staring past Mary. A man in blue coveralls was leaning a ladder against the house, just outside the windows.

“No.”

“What about that man outside?”

“The what?” Mary said, tipping at the waist like an inquisitive bird.

“The man.” Although I am aware that it is rude, I pointed.

The three of us looked at the man. He was headed up the ladder with wired Christmas lights looped around his shoulder. Young, black-haired, brown-skinned, with the taut efficiency of the very fit.

“His hands look *ever* so strong,” Betty said, stroking her fur sleeve.

“Mmm,” Mary said, sipping her drink without unhitching her eyes from the man.

“How long has he been here?” I asked.

“Oh, Wen has worked for us for *years*. Does the Christmas decorations, of course, and the hedges and lawn the rest of the year. We found him at the country club. Such a hard worker. His parents were subpars, *so* sad, but I think we can all agree that Wen is moving in the correct direction.”

“I meant to say, how long has—ah—Mr. Wen been present *today*?” I said. “Could he have stolen the scepter?”

“He *looks* as though he would steal a scepter,” Betty said, still watching Wen, still stroking her sleeve. “Simply *wrench* it from its cushion—”

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“Yes, Wen could have stolen it.” Mary drained her glass. “Through the window, with his ladder. I keep the bedroom window open. Is that all?”

Betty and I were somehow being herded out of the room.

“Might I speak to your husband, Mr. Chadwick?” I asked in the entry hall. I heard the Corg-eez yip in the distance.

“Merton really isn’t one for ladies’ conversation, but you will likely find him at Rodney’s Steak Cave just about now. He takes two hour lunches. Goodbye.”

Betty and I were outside. The door thudded.

“I will just go around and speak with the gardener,” I said, going down the front steps. Perhaps I could lose Betty if I dilly-dallied.

“I’ll catch up with you, Miss Vrynne.”

“Miss Pynne. No need to join me.” I kept walking, but when I rounded the house, I peeked back around the corner. Betty was sipping from a silver flask, lips goldfished around the spout. A tippler. Why had she refused a drink from Mary?

I approached the ladder and called, “Yoo-hoo. Mr. Wen?”

Wen looked down in surprise and then climbed to the bottom rung. “Yes?” His accent was thick with sweaty breezes and tangy fruits. His eyes were a becoming almond shape.

“Did you steal Mr. and Mrs. Chadwick’s scepter?” I asked.

“Yes?”

“You did? But why?”

“Yes?”

“Mr. Wen does not speak English,” I told Betty when I joined her at the front of the house.

“Oh.” Betty stuffed the flask into her handbag. “Pity.”

“I intend to speak to Mr. Chadwick at the—ah—the steak house.”

“I do, too. I’ll give you a lift.”

Would Dr. Cornelius consider this endeavor a proheteriariosis cure if Betty Glover tagged along everywhere? Come to think of it, Betty seemed like *she* might be afflicted with proheteriariosis as well, even though she had a husband. She’d seemed so *appalled* by those separate beds.

On the way to Betty’s Hover-Benz, I peered through the window of Wen’s Helper Hack parked in the driveway. No scepter, unless it was buried beneath atomo-power packs and wires and colored lightbulbs.



In the Hover-Benz, Betty jerked into gear and we hummed down Montcrest Avenue. My side mirror whacked a life-sized twinkling angel that was too close to the curb.

“If the scepter is only made of rubtex,” I said, “there does not seem to be a motive for stealing it.”

“Unless whoever stole it didn’t *know* it was only rubtex,” Betty said.

“Perhaps it would be advisable to slow down,” I said, covertly gripping both sides of my seat. “Oh look, there is young Mrs. Pitridge with her quintuplets. Aren’t they sweet? I knitted ten booties in three days for that family. What a nice pram they have, too, with those white tires.” Mistlehurst babies ride only in the cushiest prams, and when they become last year’s model, they are promptly donated to less fortunate babies in Suspended City.

Betty pulsed on the brakes so we could look at the babies. Blonde Mrs. Pitridge waved. “So many triplets and quadruplets nowadays,” Betty said. “When I was a girl, I didn’t even know a single pair of *twins*. My, don’t those little ones look *dusky*.”

“Mrs. Glover!” I exclaimed. I stole a parting glance at the quintuplets. Betty was very coarse to mention it, and yet...how *bad* fair Mrs. Pitridge and her ginger-haired husband produced those almond-eyed children?

Betty revved her reactor, and we zipped out of Main Street and onto the winding, wooded highway.

“Isn’t Mrs. Chadwick *delightful*?” Betty asked. The speedometer crept upward.

“The very definition of it.”

“She and her husband have won the pageant six years in a row, you know. No one is able to compete! Their turnout in the bathing suit segment last year was astonishing. Of course, *I* have never entered the pageant, but that’s because my Bert is not pageant material, and let us be frank, neither are you and I, Miss Pynne. Ladies like us must content ourselves to be the little tugboats that keep these things running, you know, rather than the glamorous sleek yachts that steal the limelight.” Betty sent me a desperate-eyed smile. “Toot-toot!”

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I must make it perfectly clear that I have never, *ever* set foot in Rodney's Steak Cave. I *do* hover past it every Saturday afternoon when Grace from Mother's crochet klatch drives us to the extramarket for our week's shopping. Rodney's Steak Cave is what the architects probably term "daring," with its low rooflines and jutting angles. The rear overlooks the Mistlehurst Golf Green.

The reception foyer was dim. As soon as Betty and I stopped in front of the podium, a Robarmaid rolled up and said, "Take. Your. Coats." It was one of the swanky models that I'd only ever seen before on the megavision, with a metal dress made to look like a French maid's uniform. We handed over our hats and coats, and the Robarmaid rolled away.

An identical Robarmaid rolled up behind the podium. "Reservation. Please," it said. "We don't have a reservation," I said. "We are here to meet Mr. Merton Chadwick."

A faint whirring from inside the Robarmaid. "Please. Come. This. Way."

Betty and I followed it into the smoky gloom of the restaurant.

Merton Chadwick lounged like a cigarette advertisement in a round leather booth. Alone. Trim gray suit, blond hair slicked and gleaming, pink cocktail. He took a pull of his cigarette, eyes narrowed, as he watched us approach.

"Mr. Chadwick?" I said. My voice sounded so tinny and *small* in here. Was it the piano jazz, or all the murmuring conversations, or this thick green carpet?

"That's me," Merton said. He looked at Betty. "Hi there, Betty. Almost didn't recognize you in that gorgeous fur—thought you were a movie star or something." He beamed and Betty simpered. We scooted into the booth. "How's the new Hover-Benz working out for you, Mrs. Glover?"

"It's peachy, Mr. Chadwick," Betty said. She turned to me. "Mr. Chadwick sold me my new hovermobile."

I was familiar with Chadwick's Fine Hovermobiles, although of course my style of living does not require such luxury.

"Drinks, ladies?" Merton asked.

"Yes, please," Betty said. "I see you're having a pink squirrel, Mr. Chadwick—I'll have one of those, too."

Merton signaled the Robarmaid. "And you, Miss—?"

How did he know I was a *Miss*? Was my proheteriariorosis visible to the naked eye? "Miss Pynne. Water, please," I said.

Merton winked, and I fumbled open my handbag just to give myself something to do.

Merton gave our order to the Robarmaid, and as it turned to wheel away, Merton smacked its bottom. It made a metallic clang.

"Oooo!" Betty cried, jumping as though it had been *her* derriere.

"You. Are. So. Naughty," the Robarmaid said, and buzzed away.

Betty was giggling and pawing Merton's arm. "You *are* naughty, Mr. Chadwick."

Merton settled back, smug.

"I *so* adore pink squirrels," Betty said. "You do remember that it was Bert and me who first introduced them to you, at your cocktail party a few weeks back?"

"Bert?" Merton said. "Oh, yeah. Bert. Had a real nice time playing squish with him at the racquet club on Wednesday."

"Squish?" Betty said. "No. Bert went out in *golf* clothes. He told me all about your golf game."

"It *was* golf, wasn't it?" Merton's face lit with a slow smile, but his eyes flashed a cornered-animal look.

Betty was frozen, her cheeks gone gray beneath her rouge crème. "Golf?"

Merton said, "Now then. What can I help you two with? Let me guess: it's that scepter business, right?"

"Yes," I said. "Dr. Cornelius has entrusted me to find it."

"You? Say, where have I seen you before?"

"I am the librarian of the Mistlehurst Public Library."

"Welp, wouldn't have seen you *there*, then, seeing as I haven't cracked a book since high school." Merton chuckled. "Say, why did Dr. Cornelius ask *you* to look into it, when Betty here is the pageant chairwoman?"

"Chairlady," Betty said in a faraway voice.

"Because Dr. Cornelius believes that I am a competent and observant lady," I said. Did proheteriariorosis give one a neck rash? My neck felt rashy.

"Okay then, and why are you talking to me? I didn't steal the scepter. For crying out loud, it was stolen out of my own bedroom."

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“I do not believe you stole it,” I said, “but I hoped that you might be able to provide some sort of, well, that you might be able to fill in the blanks, as it were, about the....” My words dribbled off. Merton wasn’t listening; his eyes were caught on something across the restaurant.

Thick glasses do not permit discretion. I leaned out of the booth and craned my neck. Merton was watching a handsome young man in animated conversation with a group of diners.

Merton snapped back to attention. “Thought I knew that fella but maybe not. What were you saying, Miss Frinne?”

I leaned back into the booth. “Miss Pynne.”

“Something about the scepter?”

“Yes. Do you have any idea who stole it?”

“None, except that I picked up the talkaphone at work yesterday morning to hear the wife squealing and crying about how it had gone missing. It happened *after* I went to work, you see. I figured the housekeeper took it. Dolores. She’s a subpar, even though Mary insists she isn’t.” Merton sipped his pink squirrel.

“*Yesterday* morning?” I asked.

“You betcha.”

Mary or Merton was lying about when the scepter was stolen. *Both* of them could be lying, in fact, and had neglected to iron out their story.

“I gotta tell you,” Merton said, “Mary’s going to be sore because the pageant bylaws state that if you don’t take care of the scepter, you’ll be disqualified from all future pageants. Not that I care much—hell, isn’t winning six times enough?—but Mary’s real upset. Gives her something to do I guess. She always wanted kids.”

Mary hadn’t seemed upset in the least.

“Just a moment,” I said. “Are you suggesting that if the scepter isn’t recovered today, then you and Mrs. Chadwick will be disqualified from competing in tonight’s pageant?”

“Afraid so.” A Robarmaid placed a steak reverently before Merton. Merton dug in.

My, my. *There* was a motive for stealing the scepter: disqualifying the unbeatable Chadwicks.



Look for the continuation of this story in *Joy to the Worlds: Holiday Stories of Mystery and Speculative Fiction*, released December 1, 2015.