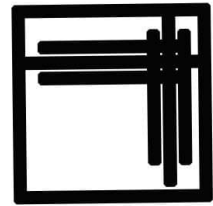


A DAIYU WU MYSTERY



# MUSIC OF DEATH BLUES

GLORIA OLIVER



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**A Daiyu Wu Mystery**



**Gloria Oliver**





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**Music of Death Blues**

A Daiyu Wu Mystery – Book 3

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# CHAPTER 01



## **1930 Dallas, TX**

A loud screeching of tires echoed down the alley behind White Laundry as I held the back door open for Dai. Prince Razor, our Pomeranian and Scottish terrier mix, shot outside, his ears on high alert.

"What in the world?"

I'd barely gotten the words out when another screech rolled toward us, accompanied by the loud pop of a backfire, as the vehicle responsible for the original noise sped off.

Since the Wus' laundry business was nestled in a quiet business section of downtown Dallas, the ruckus was unusual, to say the

least.

No other noises intruded in the ensuing silence—or so I thought. Then I realized that both Prince and Dai were still facing the direction the noises had come from, their heads tilted as if listening to something only they could hear.

Daiyu Wu, or Dai for short, is the only child of the immigrant Wu family. I serve as her companion and confidant, though in truth, we are more like siblings, her family having taken me in, at Dai's insistence, when I was seven years old. Before I forget to mention it, Dai is blind—though assuming this makes her less than whole would be an error you could come to regret.

"Jacques, someone needs our help," she said.

As if she'd given a command, Prince took off. Though we had no immediate neighbors, our building's lot had a tall fence to provide our mostly Chinese employees privacy when coming and going, so the moment he made the corner, the canine was no longer in sight.

"Why don't you wait inside, and I'll go see?" I hastily suggested, though I was sure it would get me nowhere.

"Nonsense, Jacques! Give me your arm already and let's go." She extended her arm in my direction, her diminutive form almost quivering with anticipation.

I did as I was told, though I was of two minds about the odd distraction. On the one hand, I was glad she'd found something to be excited about. On the other, I worried that there was nothing to this and she would be disappointed. After of our unexpected involvement in three cases related to murder—Laura Cooper's, Señora Fuentes Garcia, and Mr. Murphy—and Dai unraveling the

mysteries and exposing the killers, what had once passed for 'exciting' no longer held as much allure as before.

With her gloved hand tucked securely at my elbow, I navigated us into the alley and turned right. I spotted Prince some distance away, impatiently waiting for us. The mutt glanced in our direction and gave a soft bark. He'd found something. We picked up the pace.

Most of the business buildings in the area were set side by side, with the occasional exception of a narrow passage between the buildings connecting the street to the back alley. We found what we were looking for at one of these.

An elderly woman was on the ground on all fours, as if looking for something. Her navy blue dress was torn at the shoulder and stained in several places. Her veiled hat sat at an odd angle, barely keeping its place thanks to multiple hatpins. Her skin was the color of a double chocolate shake, and she had scrapes on her elbows, knees, and hands as if she'd been thrown from an automobile. She left drops of blood on the concrete as she continued to search fruitlessly for something around her.

"Ma'am, are you all right?" It seemed like a dumb question, as she obviously wasn't, but what else could I have said?

She instantly stopped at the sound of my voice and looked up, squinting her eyes at me as if struggling to see. "Come back for another round, have you? *Cowards!*"

"Jacques, I smell blood," Dai said. "I think, for all concerned, we'd best get her indoors and out of sight."

I agreed with her. It was a good thing it was Sunday, and most businesses were closed due to the blue laws. Otherwise, we would

have had a crowd of gawking curiosity-seekers filling the place. "Ma'am, let us help you. Our shop is only a little ways from here."

I stepped toward her, but she held up her hand in a stopping gesture.

"You stay right there, whoever you are." Her voice held daggers in it. "I'm not going anywhere wi'choo!"

Prince gave a delighted bark and rushed past the woman toward the street. He came back holding something gingerly in his mouth. He set it on top of her hand, then sat back, tongue lolling to the side after a job well done.

"Oh!" The woman jerked at the contact but then seemed to realize what Prince had given her: a pair of spectacles. She eagerly grabbed for them and put them on. The thick lenses made her brown eyes look overly large in her face. The earpieces were slightly bent and one lens was cracked, but she seemed elated to have them.

Then she looked at us, and her expression turned hostile. "*Oh!*"

"Jacques, we *really* need to head indoors," Dai repeated. "I hear sirens in the distance."

Her hearing being better than mine, I didn't question it. While there was nothing illegal about us being there, the fact that Dai was Chinese, and that someone had been hurt, could make things difficult for the family. Considering the current unfriendly feelings toward those of Dai's nationality, discretion would be the better part of valor.

The woman seemed even less pleased than I was at the mention of sirens. She struggled to stand and was having a hard time of it. She started teetering to one side and I jumped forward to steady

her, but she recoiled from me as if I'd bit her. Since one of her shoes was missing from her feet, this unbalanced her, so I reached out to steady her again.

"Jacques, we need to go *now*."

Left with little choice, I swept the older woman off her feet into my arms. A searching glance didn't reveal any personal effects. "Prince, find her shoe, please."

The woman was thin and wiry, weighing almost nothing, which was worrying. I expected her to struggle or argue, but she did neither, instead looking over my shoulder back to where we'd found her. It appeared we weren't the only ones who didn't want to get involved with the police.

Dai felt me beside her, grabbed my jacket sleeve, and hurried off with me. We'd just turned the corner into the alley when Prince barked, then moments later, rushed past us, a black-colored prize clutched in his teeth.

I was a little winded by the time we made it behind the safety of the high fence at White Laundry, but I didn't dare slow down. "Dai, steps."

She let go of my sleeve, well acquainted with the shop's docking area and back entrance. Despite her blindness, she rushed ahead of me and opened the door for us. The second we were all inside, she closed the door and locked it.

Now that we were out of sight, our rescue wriggled in my arms. "Put me down!"

"Sorry, ma'am, not yet." I hoofed it up the stairs into the employee breakroom. "Should we use the changing room, Dai?" I asked.

"No. We'll need water to clean her injuries," she said.

Decision made, I settled our guest into the nearest chair at the breakroom table. Once I set her down, I backed off, and Prince moved in to take my place. Our resident lady-killer sat on his back legs, lifting his front paws encouragingly, the shoe still in his mouth. Now that she was seated, she looked around jerkily, trying to take in everything at once, and Prince gave a soft whine to catch her attention.

"Oh! Is that for me?" she asked. As so many had done before her, she became putty in Prince's paws.

He dropped the shoe beside her unshod foot, then sat again, eager for female adulation. Our guest did not disappoint. "You are the cutest thing, aien'choo?"

His curled tail wagged like mad as she scratched him beneath the chin. I swear he had to be picking up tips from the rich-boy popinjay who'd nosed his way into our lives—as if we needed *two* of them.

"I'll fetch some gauze and iodine," Dai said. "Jacques, would you wet a kitchen towel to clean her wounds with?"

"We may need the sewing kit as well," I added.

As with our home, Dai was intimately acquainted with every inch of White Laundry and navigated it as well as someone with sight. The required items were in the small changing room where the ladies could freshen up when needed. Leaving our guest under Prince's watchful eye, I grabbed a fresh kitchen towel from under the sink in the breakroom and brought it over after moistening it.

"Ma'am, if I may?" I asked.

"I don't think so, no," she said, shaking her head. "I can do it myself, thank you very much."

She didn't seem inclined to take the towel from my hand, so I set it on the table within easy reach. That seemed agreeable to her, as she then took it and started dabbing at her scrapes. Although we'd come to her aid, she kept throwing glances in my direction as I stood quietly on the other side of the table from her, as if to continually make sure I wasn't up to something. What she might have imagined I was doing, I hadn't the faintest idea.

Despite her pinched expression as she cleaned her wounds, our guest made no noise, though I was sure the scrapes were painful. A few started bleeding again.

Dai returned presently, put the items she'd collected on the table, and sat in the chair closest to our guest. "Have introductions been made yet?" Dai asked.

Our guest made a soft tscking noise.

"Not yet," I said. "I thought it best to wait for you."

Dai nodded, reached inside her clutch purse, and withdrew a social card, which she then placed on the table. "My name is Daiyu Wu, and this is Jacques Haskin. Our canine companion is Prince Razor. While the circumstances aren't ideal, it's a pleasure to make your acquaintance."

A slight frown marred the older woman's face at the information and she looked at the social card on the table, though she made no move to touch it. Then she looked up and stared at Dai, taking her in fully for the first time. Her eyes widened, the expression almost

comical due to the amplification of her eyes by the thick-lensed glasses.

Dai couldn't have looked more adorable in her rose-colored puff-sleeve day dress, matching gloves, clutch, dainty hat, and dark teashade glasses. Rosa and Lien no longer drowned her clothes with lace and bows, which had made Dai look like a doll—as in a child's toy rather than the current vernacular meaning of 'an attractive young woman.' Dai had loathed being dressed that way, and had only put up with it because it made others happy. The change to a more adult-looking style was one of the *few* positive things that resulted from our having met the popinjay Truman Pierce. His appearance on the scene as a prospective gentleman caller had opened Lien's eyes to previously unexplored possibilities regarding her daughter's future.

I thought Dai looked lovely in whatever she wore. Her heart-shaped face, straight shoulder-length black hair, almond-shaped eyes, and yellowed porcelain-colored skin made her highly unusual. I will admit I am somewhat biased, however. She's always looked like an angel to me, especially when her silver-white sightless eyes weren't hidden behind her dark teashade glasses. Sadly, most people didn't find them as glorious a sight as I did.

"You're a Yellow Peril!" Her previous ordeal apparently forgotten, our guest jumped to her feet and pointed at Dai with an accusing finger.

Rather than be insulted, Dai reared back and laughed. Our guest looked as confused by this reaction as I was.

"There's no need to be rude, ma'am," I found myself saying. "We're just trying to help."

This earned me an even more baffled look from the older woman.

My words seemed to tickle Dai's fancy as she laughed even harder than before. I suddenly wondered if there might be something wrong with her. Not only was it unusual for her to laugh out loud or this heartily, but I could find nothing about the situation that would warrant such a reaction. "Dai?"

My companion held up her hand, asking for a moment as she tried to regain control. Prince seemed unperturbed, sitting on his haunches, his tongue lolling as he stared at us, full of doggie amusement at the stupid human antics.

"I apologize," Dai said breathlessly. "It just caught me off guard."

I thought back over what had been said, but I still couldn't make heads or tails of what she was talking about. And from the ever-deepening look of confusion on the older woman's face, she couldn't either.

"One question," Dai said, "just to make certain of my conclusions before I explain. You are 'colored,' are you not?"

There was a moment of startled silence.

"What's wrong wit'choo? Of course I am!"

Dai nodded. "That being the case, madam, surely you don't believe everything you read in stories and the papers. Those of your race know better than anyone the bad habit of the press to overlook facts if they impede sensationalism. I may be blind, but I am not brain-addled. Are you?"

My companion removed her teashade glasses, exposing her silver-white eyes.

The woman fell back into her chair as if all the strength had left her legs. "You're blind?"

In a close approximation of our guest's voice, Dai said, "What's wrong wit'choo? Of course I am!"

# CHAPTER 02



"Is there any iced tea left, Jacques?" Dai asked. "I think our guest could use some."

I snapped my open mouth closed, still flabbergasted at what had happened. Dai's laughter had been genuine, and finally, I realized it had been our guest's assumptions she'd found ironically amusing. I returned to the table with three glasses and a pitcher.

Our guest was still staring at Dai, and the latter held a small, impish smile, quite aware she was being looked at.

"Ma'am, would you like sugar in your tea?" I asked our guest, but she didn't seem to hear the question.

"She definitely should have some, Jacques," Dai said. "I believe the strain of her ordeal may be catching up to her."

I noticed our guest seemed to be blinking rapidly off and on, and her hands shook a little where they lay on her lap.

I added several sugar cubes to the first glass and stirred it before coming around the table and presenting it to her, bodily cutting off her view of Dai. It was as if I'd broken an electric connection. Our guest jerked in her chair to look up at me and, hesitating only a moment more, reached for the offered drink. It was gone in moments, so I refilled it when she set it down, served some for Dai and me, and then took my seat.

Her owl-sized eyes watched me with bewilderment as I did so.

"Might you give us your name now?" Dai asked her.

Our guest grabbed the refilled glass and drank half of it down before trying to answer. She would no longer look at Dai directly. "Otelia Stanton, Miss Wu. I apologize for my rudeness earlier."

"Nonsense, Mrs. Stanton. After the day you've had, you have nothing to apologize for."

I noticed her flinch when Dai referred to her as 'Mrs. Stanton' but wasn't entirely sure why. Had she given us a false name? Or was it the fact Dai addressed her by her family name rather than her first, as they did on the radio programs for all colored characters?

"You're safe here," Dai continued. "I want to assure you of that. We are well acquainted with the intolerance of some pertaining to the color of our skin. As you might imagine, I care nothing about such distinctions, and neither do the members of my family."

Mrs. Stanton shot a veiled glance in my direction. I gave a slight nod. I couldn't tell if she believed me or not. It occurred to me that if she accepted all the falsehoods spread against the Chinese as the

'Yellow Peril,' 'Yellow Menace,' 'Yellow Terror,' or the evil powers of Dr. Fu Manchu, she might think me somehow enslaved to the Wus.

"If your scrapes are clean, Jacques can put iodine on them and wrap them for you until we can get them looked at by a professional. Or, if you prefer, you may use our changing room and do it yourself," Dai suggested. "I inferred from a remark Jacques made that your dress is torn? If so, we have a sewing kit you can use as well." She indicated one of the items she'd placed on the table. "The laundry is closed today; otherwise, we'd take the dress downstairs to be cleaned and repaired. Jacques could still have a go at it, though. There should be a robe in the changing room you can use while you wait."

Our guest sipped the remainder of her tea before answering. Her previous brusque manner had changed to a more cautious, subservient air. "If you don't mind, I would like to do both things myself, missus. I've troubled you kind folks enough already." She put the cup down and clasped her hands on her lap as if to keep them still. "I really need to be going."

Dai nodded. "Jacques, would you mind showing her the way?"

I gathered the kit and waited for Mrs. Stanton. She gingerly stood, looking much steadier than previously, which I was glad to see. "This way, please, ma'am."

It was just a short walk from the breakroom to the changing room, but I went slowly, just in case. I opened the door and entered first so she could see no one else was inside and that she had nothing to fear. After setting the sewing kit on the divan, I retrieved the robe and placed it there as well. Our guest still hovered by the door as if

expecting some trick, or perhaps waiting for me to grow additional limbs. Her hands were still clasped tightly before her.

"You'll be perfectly safe here, Mrs. Stanton. Once I leave, you can lock the door behind me if you wish."

Rather than look reassured, she appeared even more reluctant.

"Do call out if you need anything," I added.

I left her there, staring after me. The stairs were visible from the breakroom, so I had no worries about her slipping away without our knowledge. As I walked away, though, I got the feeling that I was the one making her feel uncomfortable, but I wasn't sure how or why.

I found Dai drinking her tea with a pensive look on her face and Prince relaxing at her feet. "A peculiar event, don't you think?" she asked.

That was one way to put it. "Unexpected, sure."

"Yes, indeed." She tilted her head. "Was there anything odd where we found her?"

"Not that I saw. If she had a purse or something else with her, I didn't catch sight of it. The road was pretty clean, so it's unlikely we missed anything." I freshened up Mrs. Stanton's glass in case she wanted more tea when she returned.

"Good." She bent her head the other way. "Would you mind ringing Aiden and seeing if she can meet us here? I'd like her to look at Mrs. Stanton. I have a feeling our guest won't willingly come with us to a clinic or hospital, and even if she did, we'd have no way of knowing whether they would treat her. Unless you know of one that doesn't practice segregation, or specifically serves their race?"

I have to admit, I stood stunned for a moment. While I was aware of the segregation practices in the city, it had never occurred to me it would extend into the medical field. If her arm or leg were broken from being thrown to the street by ruffians, would they truly deny her aid due to the color of her skin?

"Jacques?"

Dai's voice jerked me out of my momentary stupor. "I'll go call her now." As I rushed down the hall toward Mr. Wu's office to use the telephone, I couldn't help feeling like I was running away with my tail between my legs rather than answering the question.



Much to my relief, I found Dr. Campbell at home and willing to join us. Aiden was one of the bright points that had come of sticking our noses into the business of murder when it had dropped into our laps earlier in the year. A large woman, especially when compared to Dai's diminutive size, she was extremely shy and very endearing. Dai had found a kindred spirit in the pathologist, and they quickly became the best of friends. I also counted her as one of mine, and hoped the feeling was mutual.

She turned down my offer to fetch her in the Ford, as it would take longer than using the streetcars. I made a quick call home to inform the Wus that Dai and I would be running late, but gave no specifics.

Dai's parents weren't aware of our extracurricular activities. Something we meant to keep to ourselves at all costs if I wanted to keep breathing.

Rather than return immediately to the breakroom, I pulled out a copy of the Dallas City Directory. Aside from the Colored Infants Association under 'Hospitals and Dispensaries,' I couldn't quickly find what I was looking for. I knew Dai was waiting, so I put the directory away, knowing it would take too long to search further. Perhaps Mrs. Stanton could answer the question if she decided to refuse Aiden's help.

"She's on her way," I told Dai as I reentered the breakroom.

"Excellent," Dai said. "I admit, I am very interested to find out why Mrs. Stanton was taken and dumped here. My curiosity is quite piqued."

I was well acquainted with that tone of rising excitement, even if it only happened infrequently. Surely there was a simple explanation, I told myself, and we wouldn't need to get involved. But even as I thought it, I knew it was likely a vain hope.

Mrs. Stanton still hadn't rejoined us by the time I heard a knock downstairs. I hurried down to answer it.

"Thank you for coming," I said warmly as I moved aside to let Aiden come inside. "I hope this wasn't too inconvenient for you." From her attire, I must have caught her right after she returned home from church. She tended to wear dark, neutral colors for work, but today she wore a rather fetching pale green and gray-colored dress. The touch of rouge on her cheeks and her rose-colored lipstick did much to soften her rugged features. Despite her short,

blocky form, I found her demure stance quite appealing. Her shy, ice-blue eyes, partially hidden beneath the short veil of her cloche hat, seemed to sparkle.

"I'm always happy to help."

I closed the door behind her and escorted her upstairs.

"Still no sign of Mrs. Stanton?" I asked Dai as we arrived.

"Not a peep. But Prince doesn't seem concerned, so I think she's all right." She flashed a bright smile in Aiden's direction. "You took my advice. Excellent!"

I threw a surprised glance in Aiden's direction and saw her blush. She settled a leather bag on the table. Though I'd seen it when she came in, I'd thought nothing of it, her large hands making it seem smaller than it was. But now that it was on the table, I realized it was a fine leather Gladstone bag—a doctor's medical bag. It was so new, the leathery smell couldn't be missed.

"What advice was that?" I asked.

Dai threw me a mischievous smile. "I suggested it might be helpful for her to have a medical bag. That there might be occasions when it could come in handy. And here we are!"

I groaned inside. What other devilry had she concocted to facilitate sticking her dainty nose into other people's business? I'd voiced *ad nauseam* how looking into criminal matters exposed the family to unnecessary danger. With the way society viewed the Chinese at the moment, any excuse to cause them into trouble would do. I sometimes despaired of ever getting her to understand the razor's edge she sometimes danced on. It was like trying to teach table manners to a mountain.

I sent Aiden an apologetic look, wondering when Dai had found the opportunity to badger her into this. Yet the doctor's pleased expression at Dai's praise spoke volumes about Aiden's eagerness to do things for her friend—so badgering had likely not been necessary. They were like two peas in a pod.

Prince gave a soft bark, alerting us to Mrs. Stanton's exit from the freshening room. She cautiously entered the breakroom with her canine escort, and it was as if we were meeting an entirely different person. The veiled hat now sat as it should, covering most of Mrs. Stanton's short, tightly curled black-and-gray hair. The tear in her dress had disappeared, clear evidence of her sewing skills. She'd even taken the time to wipe away the dust and grime, further erasing any hints of something having gone amiss. With the dress straightened and properly placed, it hid most of the scrapes and minor cuts she'd acquired. But the most significant transformation was in the woman herself.

Entirely gone were any signs of the spit and fire we'd witnessed when we first met. Instead, what we found before us was a servile creature, her eyes downcast and not looking or even glancing at any of us directly. Yet her comportment was such that an air of repressed strength and dignity seemed to hover just behind this new façade. She clasped and unclasped her hands, giving me the idea that there was something bothering her beyond the act of being thrown into an alley.

"I'm awful sorry for having put you to any trouble, sir and madams." Mrs. Stanton's words were soft and self-deprecating. "I'm just a silly ol' nana causing no end o'trouble. I won't be forgetting

you all's kindness, but I don't wanna put ya t'any more bother than I done already. So I thank ya, but I'll be a-goin' now as I have place to be. Thank ya again."

Bowing her head, she turned to go, still not making eye contact. I was too flabbergasted to say anything, but luckily, Dai was not.

"Mrs. Otelia Stanton!"

The older woman flinched again; it just wasn't clear whether it was due to Dai's unamused tone or her use of her full name and honorific.

"Honestly, *Mrs.* Stanton! It's a little late to act like some illiterate slave on a plantation. Even if, for some *insane* reason, you continue to think that I am the evil leader of some secret triad bent on corrupting America," Dai said with unexpected heat, "my friend has come—at some inconvenience, I might add—to make sure you're in good health. The least you could do is drop all this unnecessary silliness and let her look you over."

You could have heard a pin drop in the ensuing stunned silence.

# CHAPTER 03



I was the first to recover. I wasn't typically the one on the receiving end of Dai's ire, but I had witnessed it before, though it rarely packed this much gunpowder. Like her mother, the dragon, Dai didn't tolerate fools.

"Mrs. Stanton, sit, please." I pulled out a chair. "Dr. Campbell is quite skilled in her craft, and we'd rather be safe than sorry." *If only I could get Dai to apply this same principle to other aspects of our lives*, I mused. But it'd be best to stick to battles I thought I might win. "Unless you'd like us to call your regular physician?"

This earned me an amused snort. "The Pinkston clinic has better things to do than look at some scrapes on a silly old woman." But she took the offered chair. "You needn't waste your time either,

missus, as I really should be going." The last was aimed at Aiden. The submissive servant attitude she'd put on was no longer in sight.

"I don't mind." Aiden carefully opened her medical bag, her eyes gleaming. "This is an unusual opportunity for me."

"To see what makes a colored woman tick?" It was more of an accusation than a question.

The brusque question caught me off guard, but Aiden took it in stride. "To work on a living person."

Mrs. Stanton froze. "Come again?"

Aiden retrieved a stethoscope and a blood pressure cuff from her bag. "Typically, I work at the hospital lab or on people who are already dead."

Our guest leaped to her feet. "Just who *are* you people?"

Dai's dazzling smile could have melted butter. "Why, Mrs. Stanton, whatever could you mean? We're ordinary folk, just like yourself."

The skeptical expression adorning our guest's face said otherwise. I agreed with her—there was nothing ordinary about Dai or Aiden.

"I'm still lying in that alley, aren't I?" Mrs. Stanton asked. "Dreaming while I'm dying. Waiting for the sweet Lord to come fetch me."

She didn't seem to notice as Aiden slipped the blood pressure cuff around her arm and took a reading. By this point, our guest's glass-magnified eyes had grown so large I was sure Aiden had already easily checked them.

"Madam, you're still alive and safe," I said reassuringly. "We're only here to help."

I tried not to be offended when her mouth pulled slightly to the side, revealing her continued skepticism.

"Good job cleaning and bandaging these, Mrs. Stanton." Aiden re-tightened the gauze over our guest's right forearm. "Your blood pressure is slightly elevated, which is understandable, so that appears normal. Your pupils aren't dilated, so you most likely don't have a concussion, but if you start feeling dizzy or nauseated, get a headache, or feel generally unwell, please go to the clinic for further testing."

Though typically timid, Aiden's shyness melted away when it came to medical matters. Like Mrs. Stanton, circumstances dictated what facet of her personality we might see—although in the case of our guest, it looked to be revealed on purpose rather than something that occurred naturally.

"Now that that's settled," Dai piped up, "might you enlighten us about the circumstances that led to your present situation?"

I saw a shudder wrack our guest at the question. She looked away and said nothing.

"Do you know why they did this to you?" Dai asked softly.

"White folk don't need a reason," Mrs. Stanton said. "They just do as they please."

"Some do. That's true," Dai admitted, "but that doesn't mean they should be allowed to get away with it."

Mrs. Stanton's hands coiled into fists on her lap, her lips pressing into a thin line. "But they *do* get away with it."

"Does that mean we shouldn't even try?" Dai asked, undaunted.

Our guest sighed, visibly forcing her hands to relax. "You don't know..."

"What it's like to be belittled? Mislabeled? Hated for the color of your skin?" Dai said. "The Jim Crow laws may have started out targeting the newly freed slaves after the Civil War, but they didn't stay that way. They've been expanded to cover others—basically, anyone whose skin isn't white or who they deem unworthy. And even more restrictive laws have been created over time that have affected you and others." Dai slowly shook her head.

"My family may be more affluent than some, allowing us to own property and remain here, but if we're caught without our permits, we can be thrown on a boat and shipped out immediately, or forced into years of hard labor before being expelled. I've lived here most of my life, and this is the only country I know, yet I will never be allowed to become a citizen. So I do have at least a smattering of an idea of what it's like for you."

Mrs. Stanton stared at Dai as if she had become some unexpected creature not of this world. This wasn't the first time I'd seen Dai overcome someone with a barrage of information. I couldn't help but feel sorry for our guest, even though it seemed to do the trick.

"Fine. I'll tell you, and then I need to leave," Mrs. Stanton said. "Though I don't see what difference it will make."

Dai smiled encouragingly. I traded glances with Aiden as she took a seat, wondering what we were about to get into.

"Early church service was over, and I was chatting with the ladies before going to the back to set up our potluck luncheon. Then one of the children ran over with a note."

Dai nodded. "What did it say?"

Mrs. Stanton took a deep breath before plunging onward. "It said, 'Ma, I need you. Meet me at Elm and Ackard. Julius.'" She went silent.

"Julius is your son?" Dai prodded.

"Yes, my youngest." She wrung her hands. "He... he is not well." She sighed. "He joined the Army toward the end of the Great War and came back *different*. So I didn't tell anyone what I was doing. I just went." She sighed again. "White men were waiting for me there. I think one even rode on the streetcar I took to get there. All I could think was that this must have been how they took my son Lemuel back in '21." Her voice shook. "There was a delivery truck waiting, with the back open, and before I could do anything, they had me inside. But I wasn't having *none* of that!"

Some of the fire we'd glimpsed earlier was back. "I tried to jump back out before they got the doors closed, but one of 'em grabbed at my dress while another grabbed me by the waist. Then the truck was moving. I knocked the hats off their heads with my purse before one of 'em yanked it out of my hand. Lost my balance when the truck screeched to slow down, then the back opened again, and they *threw me out!*"

I felt as indignant as she sounded. What had the ruffians hoped to accomplish by this?

"Did they ever say anything?" Dai asked.

"No, nothing aside from some cursing. Which, now that you mention it, seems mighty peculiar." Her brow furrowed for a moment, and then her eyes grew wide again. "And I still don't know

about Julius!" Mrs. Stanton leaped to her feet. "So now that I've answered your questions, you need to let me go!"

"Wait!" I also jumped to my feet, a shot of panic setting my nerves on edge. "It's not safe for you out there alone." It was hard not to envision these sinister figures with their unknown motives coming back to look for her and finishing whatever it was they'd started. Such scenarios plagued me occasionally about the Wus due to their precarious standing in society. "Please, for my own peace of mind, allow me to drive you home."

Mrs. Stanton's mouth fell open.

# DEDICATION

This novel is dedicated to my wonderful editor, Elayne Morgan. Your insight and attention to detail is phenomenal. Thank you for helping make this book all that it could be.

ALSO BY GLORIA OLIVER

**COZY HISTORICAL MYSTERIES**



**Black Jade - A Daiyu Wu Mystery - Book 1**

*She has the murder weapon. Now she needs to find the body and the murderer. But can her need for justice shield her from death?*

Dallas 1930. Daiyu Wu never hungered for justice. Blind since birth she's frustrated at her parents' overprotectiveness, so when she realizes there's been a murder she keeps them in the dark. The police are unaware of the misdeed, so she feels compelled to find proof and drag the evil act into the light.

Worrying her parents will figure out what she's up to, Dai continues to dig for clues as to the victim's identity. But dread cloaks her when she's targeted by a spoiled rich girl whose actions might allow the killer to slither away scot-free.

Can Dai safely navigate the pitfalls as she unearths the name of the deceased and hunts those involved, or will she take a misstep and expose herself and her family to deadly retaliation?

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**Jacques - A Daiyu Wu Mystery Prequel Short**

*How many times can a boy lose his home?*

When Jacques is transferred to the Buckners Orphans' Home in 1916 at the age of six, he hopes that he's finally found a place to belong.

Unfortunately, he couldn't be more wrong.

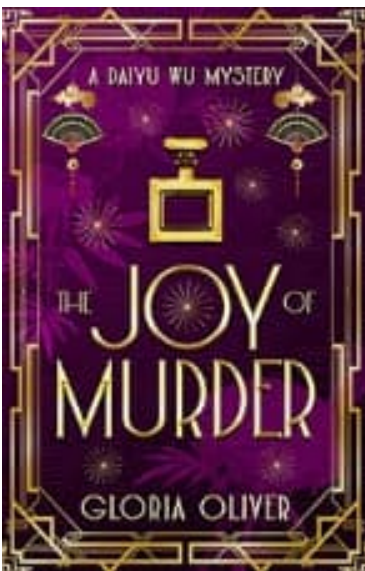
Jacques' only choice is to run away to Dallas and live on the streets.

He has no future, no guarantee he will even survive.

Then he stumbles on a once-in-a-lifetime chance to change everything—if he *dares* to take it.

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## **The JOY of Murder - A Daiyu Wu Mystery - Book 2**

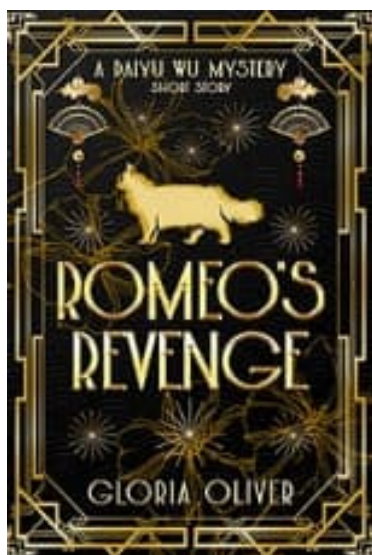
*A socialite accused of murder, planted evidence, and mysterious enemies challenge blind detective Daiyu Wu in her new sleuthing adventure.*

When a highly respected member of the 'Little Mexico' community is killed in 1930 Dallas, all the evidence points towards Grace Pierce, wife of a local businessman and a former member of the Ku Klux Klan. Grace's son Truman turns to Daiyu Wu and her unique detective skills for help, but Dai quickly discovers that nothing about this case is what it seems.

With her companion Jacques and canine bodyguard Prince Razor, Dai must navigate a family in turmoil, racial tensions, and shady business deals to find the actual killer before Truman's mother is sentenced to death.

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### **Romeo's Revenge – A Daiyu Wu Mystery Novelette**

*Two tragedies one year apart. An unlucky family or something more sinister? She intends to sniff it out.*

When Daiyu Wu learns of a pair of seemingly unrelated deaths within the same family, her inquisitive nature demands she find out more. So, with the help of her companion, Jacques, and her canine protector, Prince Razor, can this blind sleuth find the clues in time?

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## SCIENCE FICTION



### **Alien Redemption**

*She's blackmailed into a job. They discover an alien species. Will helping them get her spaced?*

Claudia Zimmerman smacks rock bottom then falls off the edge. Used as a scapegoat by her employers, the medical researcher travels to the fringes of known space but is shattered when she becomes a victim of blackmail. Coerced into joining a landing party

to an uncharted planet, her thrill at discovering a new intelligent race turns to horror when she realizes they are to be exploited.

Worrying about what they aim to do with them, Claudia tries to guard their well-being while avoiding the captain's hair-trigger temper. As delivery of the lifeforms draws near, Claudia hatches a desperate plan that could end up getting her spaced.

Realizing that the aliens carry their own secrets, will Claudia's efforts save all of them or end up dooming the entire human race?

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## **URBAN FANTASY**



### **The Secret Humankind**

*She keeps her head down and cleans up messes. When the body count starts rising, will trying to make a living get her flushed?*

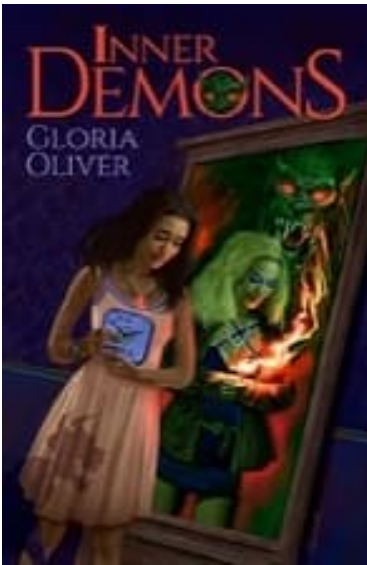
Julia Xero is stuck in survival mode. After losing the only person she loved, the introverted orphan longs to escape her toxic employment for the zen of crime and trauma scene decontamination. But when she lands her dream job and is called to a bloody rooftop with a decapitated corpse, she's horrified to come face to face with an otherworldly shark-toothed assassin.

Furious to learn she's been enlisted by a clandestine race of beings against her will, Julia's dismay fountains when she finds out they implanted her with a neck bomb to ensure her lips stay tightly sealed. Fit to be tied, and her thunderous confrontation with her boss hitting a deadend, the stubborn young woman begins plotting ways to leave the energy-powered entities in her dust.

Can she outwit an ancient civilization before her carotid goes boom?

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## **Inner Demons**

*Possessed, her life shattered and left behind like trash. She will fight to get to the truth. Anyone standing in her way will be annihilated.*

Tamara Williams is spinning like a top in six-inch heels. One moment she's cozying down with a cup of tea, and the next she's freaking out at finding herself in a dark street with headlights heading straight for her! To her chagrin she discovers she has three months of missing time in which she ruined her best friend's wedding, ditched her family and practiced blackmail.

Assuming she's bonkers, Tamara prowls for help jittery about what else she might destroy if she suffers another attack. Then she meets an older man who declares she isn't going batty but was possessed by a demon.

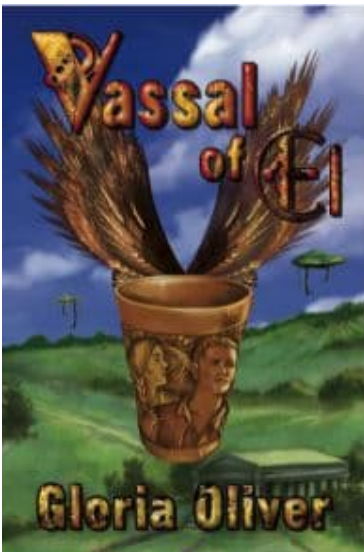
Knowing she was taken for a ride and then tossed to the gutter, can Tamara hunt down the supernatural culprit and give it a taste of its

own medicine?

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## **FANTASY**



### **Vassal of El**

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

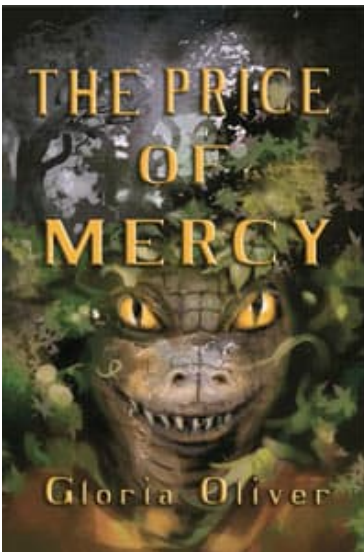
Torren wanted nothing more than to forget his past and endure the life it had forced upon him. One small, begrudging act of kindness, however, embarks him on a path that will bring him face to face with everything he has so heartily attempted to avoid.

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**

*A mission unfulfilled. A young mapmaker kidnapped by skeletons. Can he serve his new masters and live or fail them and become one of the undead?*

Toshiro Chizuson is about to lose everything. An apprentice cartographer in Nihon, he's horrified when a supernatural samurai lays claim to him and drags him away from all he knows. Though he

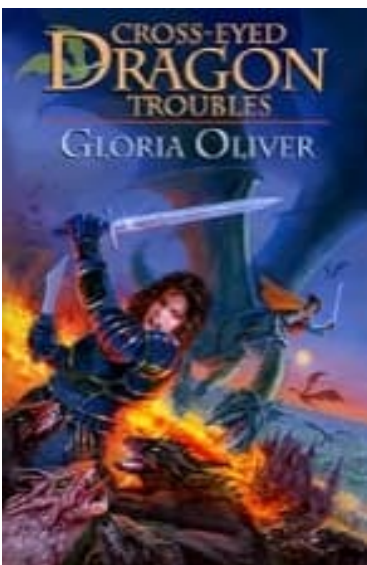
valiantly tries to escape the monster's clutches, the boy is dumbfounded when told that he will help his new master willingly or be turned into a reanimated slave.

Using the skills in navigation he picked up from a foreign captain, Toshi struggles to reign in his deepening despair as he works with the cursed crew. Yet after he gets them to their destination, he's crushed when they deny him his promised freedom.

Can Toshi untangle the mysteries tied to the supernatural samurai and cut through the obstacles in his path, or will he fail and be forced to wander forever as one of the undead?

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**Cross-eyed Dragon Troubles**

*A mental bond between a dragon and his rider has failed. A new student crashlands onto a scaly secret. Can she soar above it and spot the truth?*

Talia has never endured such isolation. When she learns she's being sent to a far-off magic school, fear of being cut off from her friendly village leaves her frightened and adrift. Then she's dismayed at the academy's admittance officer's apathy and lack of help.

Taking other new arrivals under her wing to ease their transition and her own, Talia struggles to understand the bewildering workings of the strange institute. But when she is the accidental cause of an explosive misunderstanding, she unwittingly unearths a dragon's deeply buried secret.

Can Talia unravel the enigma of the mismatched human-dragon pair and mend the damage, all while trying to keep them and herself alive?

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## **Willing Sacrifice**

*Her destiny has always been clear. When the appointed time comes, she will offer her life to save the world. But what if she's wrong, and it leads to humanity's destruction?*

La'tiera is plagued with doubts. After years of seclusion spent in preparation for her upcoming sacrifice, she's bewildered when an unexpected visitor tells her she must stay alive instead. So she battles to harden her heart and not be swayed by tempting words, knowing that caving in would result in countless gruesome deaths.

Yet seeing more of the world and interacting with others for the first time, La'tiera soon finds her resolve weakening. Still, the demons are coming and she must choose which of the two paths is the one that will not lead to humanity's doom.

Can La'tiera find evidence of her true destiny before it's too late, or will her choice cause the world to burn?

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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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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gloria Oliver lives in Texas, staying away from rolling tumbleweeds while bowing to the never-ending wishes of her feline and canine masters.

Her previous works have been fantasy, urban fantasy, science fiction, and, recently, historical cozy mystery novels. Several contain romantic and mystery elements. Her short speculative fiction stories can be found in many anthologies, covering things from the fantastic and strange to a Bubba Apocalypse.

Music of Death Blues is Oliver's third book in the Daiyu Wu Mystery series.

Gloria is a member in good standing of BroadUniverse though she has yet to make the list for Cat Slaves R Us. In her spare time (what's that?), she watches TV shows, movies, anime, plays PC games, and reads books.

For some free reads, sample chapters, appearance schedule, and more information on her and her works, please drop by and visit her at [www.gloriaoliver.com](http://www.gloriaoliver.com) or subscribe at [www.gloriaoliver.com/subscribe](http://www.gloriaoliver.com/subscribe) to get news, deals, releases, and a free gift for joining!