

THE HERBALIST

Some problems seem unsolvable—unnamable even. That’s where Drea Marks comes in. Her work is unconventional and sometimes on the fringes of the law but what’s legal isn’t always what’s best.

Dive into this 12-part series of suspense, alchemy, and personal transformation.

Drea mounted the escalator easily like a true city dweller, with no hesitation at merging with a moving entity. Her black boots and long, tattered, faded black coat clashed with the innocence of her face. With plump cheeks, and a round face, her amber eyes like saucers, she looked like a forgotten doll—even behind her bold piercings, three in her left eyebrow, one in her nose, a barbell shoved through her right cheek like a twig through a perfectly toasted marshmallow.

When she exited the subway station, Drea entered a world that didn’t understand her. At Rosedale, people never looked like they went home alone filled with self-hatred, reflecting on everything they had said that

Part one
By Diz Eartham

day and finding fault with all of it. Drea knew, of course, that things are not often as they appear. These people did exactly that; only with nice clothes and fake smiles to convince people that money could buy happiness and that inequitable concentrations of wealth in the upper class were therefore entirely warranted.

Walking determinedly without ever looking towards the ground was Drea’s way of appearing stable and confident. Her piercings and hard expression covered her inviting appearance. She preferred to be left alone yet somehow was born with a most approachable face. These Rosedale people hid from their humanity behind expensive clothes, fancy cars, and redundant properties. Drea hid from hers behind a façade of defiant contentment.



Drea had often thought of taking her own life, cynically doubting we’re all here for a reason. But then she challenged herself to survive as long as she could, just to prove it was possible. And knowing she had a gift that could help others eased for her that challenge.

The tree-lined street Drea was marching down was sickeningly perfect. It hosted immaculate homes that any child would detest playing in. A spilled cup of juice or broken ornament of inordinately high value would spell the end of fun for weeks as a mother would fawn over the loss of a precious thing. In years to come, the kids of these homes would fawn over the loss of precious childhoods. It was no wonder to Drea that she had had so many clients in these higher end neighbourhoods in Toronto.

Drea reached into her pocket as she neared the dream home she was headed to. She dug out a crumpled envelope with a note and two keys enclosed.

“My address is 6 Beaumont Road. The small key is for the outer gate; the big one is for my front door. Let yourself in and, if anyone asks, you’re my new cleaning lady,” it read.

Drea pulled out the keys and crushed the note and envelope before throwing them back into

her deep pocket. She laughed at the thought of being a cleaning lady. Some cleaner she would make with steel-toed boots, black cargo pants, a mesh top, and no cleaning supplies in sight. She decided that if anyone asked, she would say she was applying for the job. From the brief conversation she had with Laura when setting up this appointment, she didn’t believe Laura ever would have hired someone like her to clean her home.

6 Beaumont Road presented like a fortress. It was massive. A home for at least 5, Drea suspected. Situated far away from the street, with a rock wall and gate protecting it and big green trees providing plenty of cover, 6 Beaumont looked like the type of place that could keep you safe. But you’re only as safe as what you keep out of your home and life. Laura had certainly let danger in.

Drea stuck the small key into the lock of the gate. It squealed a little as rust flaked off inside...