

A RIZZOLI & ISLES THRILLER

TESS
GERRITSEN

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SUNDAY EXPRESS

BODY
DOUBLE

BLOOD TIES ARE THE
HARDEST TO ESCAPE ...



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Bestselling author Tess Gerritsen is also a doctor, and she brings to her novels her first-hand knowledge of emergency and autopsy rooms.

But her interests span far wider than medical topics. As an anthropology undergraduate at Stanford University, she catalogued centuries-old human remains, and she continues to travel the world, driven by her fascination with ancient cultures and bizarre natural phenomena.

Now a full-time novelist, she lives with her husband in Maine.

For more information about Tess Gerritsen and her novels, visit her website at www.tessgerritsen.co.uk

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BODY DOUBLE

Tess Gerritsen



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To Adam and Danielle

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BODY DOUBLE

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Prologue

That boy was watching her again.

Fourteen-year-old Alice Rose tried to focus on the ten exam questions on her desk, but her mind was not on freshman English; it was on Elijah. She could feel the boy's gaze, like a beam aimed at her face, could feel its heat on her cheek, and knew she was blushing.

Concentrate, Alice!

The next question on the test was smudged from the mimeograph machine, and she had to squint to make out the words.

Charles Dickens often chooses names that match his characters' traits. Give some examples and describe why the names fit those particular characters.

Alice chewed her pencil, trying to dredge up an answer. But she couldn't think while *he* was sitting at the next desk, so close that she could inhale his scent of pine soap and wood smoke. Manly smells. Dickens, Dickens, who cared about Charles Dickens and Nicholas Nickleby and

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boring freshman English when gorgeous Elijah Lank was looking at her? Oh my, he was so handsome, with his black hair and blue eyes. Tony Curtis eyes. The very first time she'd ever seen Elijah, that's what she'd thought: that he looked exactly like Tony Curtis, whose beautiful face beamed from the pages of her favorite magazines, *Modern Screen* and *Photoplay*.

She bent her head forward, and as her hair fell across her face, she cast a furtive glance sideways through the curtain of blond strands. Felt her heart leap when she confirmed that he was, indeed, looking at her, and not in that disdainful way that all the other boys in school did, those mean boys who made her feel slow and dim-witted. Whose ridiculing whispers were always just out of earshot, too soft for her to make out their words. She knew the whispers were about her, because they were always looking at her as they did it. Those were the same boys who'd taped the photo of a cow to her locker, who moped if she accidentally brushed against them in the hallway. But Elijah – he was looking at her in a different way altogether. With smoldering eyes. Movie star eyes.

Slowly she raised her head and stared back, not through a protective veil of hair this time, but with frank acknowledgment of his gaze. His test paper was already completed and turned facedown, his pencil put away in his desk. His full attention was focused on her, and she could scarcely breathe under the spell of his gaze.

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He likes me. I know it. He likes me.

Her hand lifted to her throat, to the top button of her blouse. Her fingers brushed across her skin, leaving a trail of heat. She thought of Tony Curtis's molten gaze on Lana Turner, a look that could make a girl go tongue-tied and wobble-kneed. The look that came just before the inevitable kiss. That's when the movies always went out of focus. Why did that have to happen? Why did it always go fuzzy, just at the moment when you most wanted to see . . .

'Time's up, class! Please turn in your test papers.'

Alice's attention snapped back to her desk, to the mimeographed test paper, half the questions still unanswered. Oh, no. Where had the time gone? She *knew* these answers. She just needed a few more minutes . . .

'Alice. Alice!'

She looked up and saw Mrs Meriweather's hand held out.

'Didn't you hear me? Time to turn in your test.'

'But I—'

'No excuses. You've got to start *listening*, Alice.' Mrs Meriweather snatched up Alice's exam and moved on down the aisle. Though Alice could barely hear their murmurs, she knew the girls right behind her were gossiping about her. She turned and saw their heads bent together, their hands shielding their mouths, muffling giggles. *Alice can read lips, so don't let her see we're talking about her.*

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Now some of the boys were laughing, too, pointing at her. What was so funny?

Alice glanced down. To her horror she saw that the top button had fallen off her blouse, which was now gaping open.

The school bell rang, announcing dismissal.

Alice snatched up her book bag and hugged it to her chest as she fled the classroom. She didn't dare look anyone in the eye, just kept walking, head down, tears building in her throat. She dashed into the restroom and locked herself in a stall. As other girls came in and stood laughing, primping in front of the mirrors, Alice hid behind the latched door. She could smell all their different perfumes, could feel the whoosh of air each time the door swung open. Those golden girls, with their brand-new sweater sets. They never lost buttons; they never came to school wearing hand-me-down skirts and shoes with cardboard soles.

Go away. Everyone please just go away.

The door finally stopped whooshing open.

Pressed up against the stall door, Alice strained to hear if anyone was still in the room. Peeking out through the crack, she saw no one standing in front of the mirror. Only then did she creep out of the bathroom.

The hallway was deserted as well, everyone gone for the day. There was no one to torment her. She walked, shoulders hunched self-protectively, down the long corridor with its battered lockers and wall posters announcing the Halloween dance in two weeks. A dance she would certainly not be

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going to. The humiliation of last week's dance still stung, and would probably always sting. The two hours of standing alone against the wall, waiting, hoping a boy would ask her onto the floor. When a boy had at last approached her, it was not to dance. Instead he'd suddenly doubled over and thrown up on her shoes. No more dances for her. She'd been in this town only two months, and already she wished her mother would pack them up and move them again, take them someplace where they could start over. Where things would finally be different.

Only, they never are.

She walked out the school's front entrance, into the autumn sunshine. Bending over her bicycle, she was so intent on opening the lock that she didn't hear the footsteps. Only as his shadow fell across her face did she realize Elijah was standing beside her.

'Hello, Alice.'

She jerked to her feet, sending her bike crashing onto its side. Oh god, she was an idiot. How could she be so clumsy?

'That was a hard exam, wasn't it?' He spoke slowly, distinctly. That was one more thing she liked about Elijah; unlike the other kids, his voice was always clear, never muddled. And he always let her see his lips. He knows my secret, she thought. Yet he still wants to be my friend.

'So did you finish all the questions?' he asked.

She bent down to pick up her bike. 'I knew the answers. I just needed more time.' As she

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straightened, she saw that his gaze had dropped to her blouse. To the gap left by the missing button. Flushing, she crossed her arms.

‘I’ve got a safety pin,’ he said.

‘What?’

He reached in his pocket and pulled out a pin. ‘I’m always losing buttons myself. It’s kind of embarrassing. Here, let me fasten it for you.’

She held her breath as he reached for her blouse. She could barely suppress her trembling as he slipped his finger beneath the fabric to close the pin. Does he feel my heart pounding? she wondered. Does he know I’m dizzy from his touch?

When he stepped back, her breath flew out. She looked down and saw that the gap was now modestly pinned shut.

‘Better?’ he asked.

‘Oh. Yes!’ She paused to compose herself. Said, with queenly dignity: ‘Thank you, Elijah. That’s very thoughtful of you.’

A moment passed. Crows cawed, and the autumn leaves were like bright flames engulfing the branches above.

‘You think you could help me with something, Alice?’ he asked.

‘With what?’

Oh, stupid, stupid answer. You should just have said yes! Yes, I’ll do anything for you, Elijah Lank.

‘I’ve got this project I’m doing for biology. I need a partner to help me with it, and I don’t know who else to ask.’

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‘What kind of project is it?’

‘I’ll show you. We’ve got to go up by my house.’

His house. She’d never been to a boy’s house.

She nodded. ‘Let me drop my books off at home.’

He pulled his bike from the rack. It was almost as battered as hers, the fenders going rusty, the vinyl peeling off the seat. That old bike made her like him even more. We’re a real pair, she thought. Tony Curtis and me.

They rode to her house first. She didn’t invite him in; she was too embarrassed to let him see the shabby furniture, the paint peeling off the walls. She just ran inside, dumped her book bag on the kitchen table, and ran out.

Unfortunately, her brother’s dog, Buddy, did as well. Just as she came out the front door, he scampered out in a blur of black and white.

‘Buddy!’ she yelled. ‘You come back here!’

‘He doesn’t listen very well, does he?’ said Elijah.

‘Because he’s a stupid dog. *Buddy!*’

The mutt glanced back, tail wagging, then trotted off down the road.

‘Oh, never mind,’ she said. ‘He’ll come home when he’s ready.’ She climbed onto her bike. ‘So where do you live?’

‘Up on Skyline Road. You ever been up there?’

‘No.’

‘It’s kind of a long ride up the hill. Think you can make it?’

She nodded. *I can do anything for you.*

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They pedaled away from her house. She hoped that he'd turn onto Main Street, past the malt shop where the kids always hung out after school playing the jukebox and sipping their sodas. They'll see us go riding by together, she thought, and wouldn't that set the girls' tongues wagging? There goes Alice and Elijah-with-the-blue-eyes.

But he didn't lead her down Main Street. Instead, he turned up Locust Lane, where there were hardly any houses, just the backside of a few businesses and the employee parking lot for the Neptune's Bounty Cannery. Oh, well. She was riding with him, wasn't she? Close enough behind him to watch his thighs pumping, his rear end perched on the seat.

He glanced back at her, and his black hair danced in the wind. 'You doing okay, Alice?'

'I'm fine.' Though the truth was, she was getting out of breath because they had left the village and were starting to climb up the mountain. Elijah must ride his bike up Skyline every day, so he was used to it; he seemed hardly winded, his legs moving like powerful pistons. But she was panting, pushing herself onward. A flash of fur caught her eye. She glanced sideways and saw that Buddy had followed them. He looked tired too, his tongue hanging way out as he ran to keep up.

'Go home!'

'What did you say?' Elijah glanced back.

'It's that stupid dog again,' she panted. 'He won't stop following us. He's gonna – gonna get lost.'

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She glared at Buddy, but he just kept trotting along beside her in his cheerful dumb dog way. Well, go ahead, she thought. Tucker yourself out. I don't care.

They kept moving up the mountain, the road winding in gentle switchbacks. Through the trees she caught occasional glimpses of Fox Harbor far below, the water like battered copper in the afternoon sunlight. Then the trees became too thick, and she could see only the forest, clothed in brilliant reds and oranges. The leaf-strewn road curved ahead of them.

When at last Elijah pedaled to a stop, Alice's legs were so tired she could barely stand without trembling. Buddy was nowhere in sight; she only hoped he could find his own way home, because she sure wasn't going to go looking for him. Not now, not with Elijah standing here, smiling at her, his eyes glittering. He leaned his bike up against a tree and hoisted his book bag over his shoulder.

'So where's your house?' she asked.

'It's that driveway there.' He pointed down the road, to a mailbox rusting on a post.

'Aren't we going to your house?'

'Naw, my cousin's home sick today. She was throwing up all night, so let's not go in the house. Anyway, my project's out here, in the woods. Leave your bike. We're gonna have to walk.'

She propped her bike up next to his and followed him, her legs still wobbly from the ride up the mountain. They tramped into woods. The trees were dense here, the ground thickly carpeted

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by leaves. Gamely she followed him, waving at mosquitoes. 'So your cousin lives with you?' she asked.

'Yeah, she came to stay with us last year. I guess it's permanent now. Got nowhere else to go.'

'Your parents don't mind?'

'It's just my dad. My mom's dead.'

'Oh.' She didn't know what to say about that. Finally murmured a simple 'I'm sorry,' but he didn't seem to hear her.

The undergrowth became thicker, and brambles scratched her bare legs. She had trouble keeping up with him. He was pulling ahead of her, leaving her with her skirt snagged on blackberry canes.

'Elijah!'

He didn't answer. He just kept moving ahead like a bold explorer, his book bag slung over his shoulder.

'Wait!'

'Do you want to see this or don't you?'

'Yes, but—'

'Then come *on*.' His voice had taken on an impatient edge and it startled her. He stood a few yards ahead, looking back at her, and she noticed that his hands were clenched into fists.

'Okay,' she said meekly. 'I'm coming.'

A few yards farther, the woods suddenly opened up into a clearing. She saw an old stone foundation, all that remained of a long-gone farmhouse. Elijah glanced back at her, his face dappled by afternoon light.

'It's right here,' he said.

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‘What is?’

He bent down and pulled aside two wooden boards, revealing a deep hole. ‘Take a look in there,’ he said. ‘I spent three weeks digging that.’

Slowly she approached the pit and stared inside. The afternoon light was slanting low behind the trees, and the bottom of the hole was in shadow. She could make out a layer of dead leaves, which had accumulated at the bottom. A rope was curled over the side.

‘Is this to trap a bear, or something?’

‘It could. If I laid some branches over it, to hide the opening, I could catch a lot of things. Even a deer.’ He pointed into the hole.

‘Look, you see it?’

She leaned in closer. Something gleamed faintly in the shadows below; chips of white that peeked out from beneath the scattering of leaves.

‘What is it?’

‘That’s my project.’ He reached for the rope and pulled.

At the bottom of the pit, leaves rustled, boiled up. Alice stared as the rope went taut, as Elijah hauled up something from the shadows. A basket. He pulled it out of the hole and set it on the ground. Brushing aside the leaves, he revealed what had gleamed white at the pit’s bottom.

It was a small skull.

As he picked off the leaves, she saw clumps of black fur and spindly ribs. A knobby chain of spine. Leg bones as delicate as twigs.

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‘Isn’t that something? It doesn’t even smell anymore,’ he said.

‘Been down there almost seven months now. Last time I checked it, there was still some meat on it. Neat how even that disappears. It started to rot real fast after it got warm, back in May.’

‘What is it?’

‘Can’t you tell?’

‘No.’

Picking up the skull, he gave it a little twist, pulling it off the spine. She flinched as he thrust it toward her.

‘Don’t!’ she squealed.

‘Meow!’

‘Elijah!’

‘Well, you did ask what it was.’

She stared at hollow eye sockets. ‘It’s a cat?’

He pulled a grocery sack out of his book bag and began placing the bones in the sack.

‘What are you going to do with the skeleton?’

‘It’s my science project. From kitty to skeleton in seven months.’

‘Where did you get the cat?’

‘Found it.’

‘You just *found* a dead cat?’

He looked up. His blue eyes were smiling. But these were no longer Tony Curtis eyes anymore; these eyes scared her. ‘Who said it was dead?’

Her heart was suddenly pounding. She took a step back. ‘You know, I think I have to go home now.’

‘Why?’

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‘Homework. I’ve got homework.’

He was on his feet now, had sprung there effortlessly. The smile was gone, replaced by a look of quiet expectation.

‘I’ll . . . see you at school,’ she said. She backed away, glancing left and right at woods that looked the same in every direction. Which way had they come from? Which way should she go?

‘But you just got here, Alice,’ he said. He was holding something in his hand. Only as he raised it over his head did she see what it was.

A rock.

The blow sent her to her knees. She crouched in the dirt, her vision almost black, her limbs numb. She felt no pain, just dumb disbelief that he had hit her. She started to crawl, but could not see where she was going. Then he grabbed her ankles and yanked her backward. Her face scraped against the ground as he dragged her by her feet. She tried to kick free, tried to scream, but her mouth filled with dirt and twigs as he pulled her toward the pit. Just as her feet dropped over the edge, she grabbed a sapling and held on, her legs dangling into the hole.

‘Let go, Alice,’ he said.

‘Pull me up! Pull me up!’

‘I said, let go.’ He lifted a rock and brought it down on her hand.

She shrieked and lost her grip. Slid feetfirst into the hole, landing on a bed of dead leaves.

‘Alice. Alice.’

Stunned by the fall, she looked up at the circle

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of sky above, and saw the silhouette of his head, leaning forward, peering down at her.

‘Why are you doing this?’ she sobbed. ‘*Why?*’

‘It’s nothing personal. I just want to see how long it takes. Seven months for a kitty. How long do you think it’ll take you?’

‘You can’t do this to me!’

‘Bye-bye, Alice.’

‘Elijah! *Elijah!*’

The wooden boards slid across the opening, eclipsing the circle of light. Her last glimpse of sky vanished. This isn’t real, she thought. This is a joke. He’s just trying to scare me. He’ll leave me down here for a few minutes, and then he’ll come back and let me out. Of course he’ll come back.

Then she heard something thud onto the well cover. *Rocks. He’s piling rocks on top.*

She stood up and tried to climb out of the hole. Found a dry wisp of vine that immediately disintegrated in her hands. She clawed at the dirt, but could not find a handhold, could not pull herself even a few inches without sliding back. Her screams pierced the darkness.

‘Elijah!’ she shrieked.

Her only answer was stones thudding onto wood.

One

Pesez le matin que vous n'irez peut-être pas jusqu'au soir, Et au soir que vous n'irez peut-être pas jusqu'au matin. Be aware every morning that you may not last the day, And every evening that you may not last the night.

— ENGRAVED PLAQUE IN THE CATACOMBS OF PARIS

A row of skulls glared from atop a wall of intricately stacked femurs and tibias. Though it was June, and she knew the sun was shining on the streets of Paris sixty feet above her, Dr Maura Isles felt chilled as she walked down the dim passageway, its walls lined almost to the ceiling with human remains. She was familiar, even intimate, with death, and had confronted its face countless times on her autopsy table, but she was stunned by the scale of this display, by the sheer number of bones stored in this network of tunnels beneath the City of Light. The one-kilometer tour took her through only a small section of the catacombs. Off-limits to tourists were numerous

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side tunnels and bone-filled chambers, their dark mouths gaping seductively behind locked gates. Here were the remains of six million Parisians who had once felt the sun on their faces, who had hungered and thirsted and loved, who had felt the beating of their own hearts in their chests, the rush of air in and out of their lungs. They could never have imagined that one day their bones would be unearthed from their cemetery resting places, and moved to this grim ossuary beneath the city.

That one day they would be on display, to be gawked at by hordes of tourists.

A century and a half ago, to make room for the steady influx of dead into Paris's overcrowded cemeteries, the bones had been disinterred and moved into the vast honeycomb of ancient limestone quarries that lay deep beneath the city. The workmen who'd transferred the bones had not carelessly tossed them into piles, but had performed their macabre task with flair, meticulously stacking them to form whimsical designs. Like fussy stonemasons, they had built high walls decorated with alternating layers of skulls and long bones, turning decay into an artistic statement. And they had hung plaques engraved with grim quotations, reminders to all who walked these passageways that Death spares no one.

One of the plaques caught Maura's eye, and she paused among the flow of tourists to read it. As she struggled to translate the words using her shaky high school French, she heard the incongruous sound of children's laughter echoing

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in the dim corridors, and the twang of a man's Texas accent as he muttered to his wife. 'Can you believe this place, Sherry? Gives me the goddamn creeps . . .'

The Texas couple moved on, their voices fading into silence. For a moment Maura was alone in the chamber, breathing in the dust of the centuries. Under the dim glow of the tunnel light, mold had flourished on a cluster of skulls, coating them in a greenish cast. A single bullet hole gaped in the forehead of one skull, like a third eye.

I know how you died.

The chill of the tunnel had seeped into her own bones. But she did not move, determined to translate that plaque, to quell her horror by engaging in a useless intellectual puzzle. Come on, Maura. Three years of high school French, and you can't figure this out? It was a personal challenge now, all thoughts of mortality temporarily held at bay. Then the words took on meaning, and she felt her blood go cold . . .

*Happy is he who is forever faced with the
hour of his death
And prepares himself for the end every day.*

Suddenly she noticed the silence. No voices, no echoing footsteps. She turned and left that gloomy chamber. How had she fallen so far behind the other tourists? She was alone in this tunnel, alone with the dead. She thought about unexpected power outages, about wandering the wrong way

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in pitch darkness. She'd heard of Parisian workmen a century ago who had lost their way in the catacombs and died of starvation. Her pace quickened as she sought to catch up with the others, to rejoin the company of the living. She felt Death pressing in too closely in these tunnels. The skulls seemed to stare back at her with resentment, a chorus of six million berating her for her ghoulish curiosity.

We were once as alive as you are. Do you think you can escape the future you see here?

When at last she emerged from the catacombs and stepped into the sunshine on Rue Remy Dumoncel, she took in deep breaths of air. For once she welcomed the noise of traffic, the press of the crowd, as if she had just been granted a second chance at life. The colors seemed brighter, the faces friendlier. My last day in Paris, she thought, and only now do I really appreciate the beauty of this city. She had spent most of the past week trapped in meeting rooms, attending the International Conference of Forensic Pathology. There had been so little time for sightseeing, and even the tours arranged by the conference organizers had been related to death and illness: the medical museum, the old surgical theater.

The catacombs.

Of all the memories to bring back from Paris, how ironic that her most vivid one would be of human remains. That's not healthy, she thought as she sat at an outdoor café, savoring one last cup of espresso and a strawberry tart. In two days, I'll be

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back in my autopsy room, surrounded by stainless steel, shut off from sunlight. Breathing only the cold, filtered air flowing from the vents. This day will seem like a memory of paradise.

She took her time, recording those memories. The smell of coffee, the taste of buttery pastry. The natty businessmen with cell phones pressed to their ears, the intricate knots of the scarves fluttering around women's throats. She entertained the fantasy that surely danced in the head of every American who had ever visited Paris: What would it be like to miss my plane? To just linger here, in this café, in this glorious city, for the rest of my life?

But in the end, she rose from her table and hailed a taxi to the airport. In the end she walked away from the fantasy, from Paris, but only because she promised herself she would someday return. She just didn't know when.

Her flight home was delayed three hours. That's three hours I could have spent walking along the Seine, she thought as she sat disgruntled in Charles de Gaulle. Three hours I could have wandered the Marais or poked around in Les Halles. Instead she was trapped in an airport so crowded with travelers she could find no place to sit. By the time she finally boarded the Air France jet, she was tired and thoroughly cranky. One glass of wine with the inflight meal was all it took for her to fall into a deep and dreamless sleep.

Only as the plane began its descent into Boston

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did she awaken. Her head ached, and the setting sun glared in her eyes. The headache intensified as she stood in baggage claim, watching suitcase after suitcase, none of them hers, slide down the ramp. It grew to a relentless pounding as she later waited in line to file a claim for her missing luggage. By the time she finally stepped into a taxi with only her carry-on bag, darkness had fallen, and she wanted nothing more than a hot bath and a hefty dose of Advil. She sank back in the taxi and once again drifted off to sleep.

The sudden braking of the vehicle awakened her.

‘What’s going on here?’ she heard the driver say.

Stirring, she gazed through bleary eyes at flashing blue lights. It took a moment for her to register what she was looking at. Then she realized that they had turned onto the street where she lived, and she sat up, instantly alert, alarmed by what she saw. Four Brookline police cruisers were parked, their roof lights slicing through the darkness.

‘Looks like some kind of emergency going on,’ the driver said. ‘This is your street, right?’

‘And that’s my house right down there. Middle of the block.’

‘Where all the police cars are? I don’t think they’re gonna let us through.’

As if to confirm the taxi driver’s words, a patrolman approached, waving at them to turn around.

The cabbie stuck his head out the window. ‘I got a passenger here I need to drop off. She lives on

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this street.'

'Sorry, bud. This whole block's cordoned off.'

Maura leaned forward and said to the driver, 'Look, I'll just get out here.' She handed him the fare, grabbed her carry-on bag, and stepped out of the taxi. Only moments before, she'd felt dull and groggy; now the warm June night itself seemed electric with tension. She started up the sidewalk, her sense of anxiety growing as she drew closer to the gathering of bystanders, as she saw all the official vehicles parked in front of her house. Had something happened to one of her neighbors? A host of terrible possibilities passed through her mind. Suicide. Homicide. She thought of Mr Telushkin, the unmarried robotics engineer who lived next door. Hadn't he seemed particularly melancholy when she'd last seen him? She thought, too, of Lily and Susan, her neighbors on the other side, two lesbian attorneys whose gay rights activism made them high-profile targets. Then she spotted Lily and Susan standing at the edge of the crowd, both of them very much alive, and her concern flew back to Mr Telushkin, whom she did not see among the onlookers.

Lily glanced sideways and saw Maura approaching. She did not wave but just stared at her, wordless, and gave Susan a sharp nudge. Susan turned to look at Maura, and her jaw dropped open. Now other neighbors were turning to stare as well, all their faces registering astonishment.

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Why are they looking at me? Maura wondered. What have I done?

'*Dr Isles?*' A Brookline patrolman stood gaping at her. 'It is – it is *you*, isn't it?' he asked.

Well, that was a stupid question, she thought. 'That's my house, there. What's going on, officer?'

The patrolman huffed out a sharp breath. 'Um – I think you'd better come with me.'

He took her by the arm and led her through the crowd. Her neighbors solemnly parted before her, as though making way for a condemned prisoner. Their silence was eerie; the only sound was the crackle of police radios. They reached a barrier of yellow police tape, strung between stakes, several of them pounded into Mr Telushkin's front yard. *He's proud of his lawn and he's not going to be happy about that*, was her immediate and utterly inane thought. The patrolman lifted the tape and she ducked under it, crossing into what she now realized was a crime scene.

She knew it was a crime scene because she spotted a familiar figure standing at the center of it. Even from across the lawn, Maura could recognize homicide detective Jane Rizzoli. Now eight months pregnant, the petite Rizzoli looked like a ripe pear in a pantsuit. Her presence was yet another bewildering detail. What was a Boston detective doing here in Brookline, outside her usual jurisdiction? Rizzoli did not see Maura approaching; her gaze was fixed instead on a car parked at the curb in front of Mr Telushkin's house. She was shaking her head, clearly upset,

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her dark curls springing out in their usual disarray.

It was Rizzoli's partner, Detective Barry Frost, who spotted Maura first. He glanced at her, glanced away, and then did a sudden double take, his pale face whipping back to stare at her. Wordlessly he tugged on his partner's arm.

Rizzoli went absolutely still, the strobelike flashes of blue cruiser lights illuminating her expression of disbelief. She began to walk, as though in a trance, toward Maura.

'Doc?' Rizzoli said softly. 'Is that you?'

'Who else would it be? Why does everyone keep asking me that? Why do you all look at me as though I'm a ghost?'

'Because . . . ' Rizzoli stopped. Gave a shake of her head, tossing unkempt curls. 'Jesus. I thought for a minute you were a ghost.'

'What?'

Rizzoli turned and called out: 'Father Brophy?'

Maura had not seen the priest standing off by himself at the periphery. Now he emerged from the shadows, his collar a slash of white across his neck. His usually handsome face looked gaunt, his expression shell-shocked. *Why is Daniel here?* Priests were not usually called to crime scenes unless a victim's family requested counsel. Her neighbor Mr Telushkin was not Catholic, but Jewish. He would have no reason to request a priest.

'Could you please take her into the house, Father?' Rizzoli said.

Maura asked: 'Is anyone going to tell me what's going on?'

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‘Go inside, Doc. Please. We’ll explain later.’

Maura felt Brophy’s arm slip around her waist, his firm grasp clearly communicating that this was not the time for her to resist. That she should simply obey the detective’s request. She allowed him to guide her to her front door, and she registered the secret thrill of the close contact between them, the warmth of his body pressed against hers. She was so aware of him standing beside her that her hands were clumsy as she inserted the key into her front door. Though they had been friends for months, she had never before invited Daniel Brophy into her house, and her reaction to him now was a reminder of why she had so carefully maintained a distance between them. They stepped inside, into a living room where the lamps were already on, lit by automatic timers. She paused for a moment near the couch, uncertain of what to do next.

It was Father Brophy who took command.

‘Sit down,’ he said, pointing her to the couch. ‘I’ll get you something to drink.’

‘You’re the guest in my house. I should be offering you the drink,’ she said.

‘Not under the circumstances.’

‘I don’t even know what the circumstances are.’

‘Detective Rizzoli will tell you.’ He left the room and came back with a glass of water – not exactly her beverage of choice at that moment, but then, it didn’t seem appropriate to ask a priest to fetch the bottle of vodka. She sipped the water, feeling uneasy under his gaze. He sank into the chair

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across from her, watching her as though afraid she might vanish.

At last she heard Rizzoli and Frost come into the house, heard them murmuring in the foyer to a third person, a voice Maura didn't recognize. Secrets, she thought. Why is everyone keeping secrets from me? What don't they want me to know?

She looked up as the two detectives walked into the living room. With them was a man who introduced himself as Brookline Detective Eckert, a name she'd probably forget within five minutes. Her attention was completely focused on Rizzoli, with whom she had worked before. A woman she both liked and respected.

The detectives all settled into chairs, Rizzoli and Frost facing Maura across the coffee table. She felt outnumbered, four to one, everyone's gazes on her. Frost pulled out his notepad and pen. Why was he taking notes? Why did this feel like the start of an interrogation?

'How are you doing, Doc?' Rizzoli asked, her voice soft with concern.

Maura laughed at the trite question. 'I'd be doing a lot better if I knew what was going on.'

'Can I ask you where you've been tonight?'

'I just got home from the airport.'

'Why were you at the airport?'

'I flew in from Paris. From Charles de Gaulle. It was a long flight, and I'm not in the mood for twenty questions.'

'How long were you in Paris?'

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‘A week. I flew there last Wednesday.’ Maura thought she detected a note of accusation in Rizzoli’s brusque questions, and her irritation was now building toward anger. ‘If you don’t believe me, you can ask my secretary, Louise. She’s the one who booked the flight for me. I was there for a meeting—’

‘The International Conference of Forensic Pathology. Is that correct?’

Maura was taken aback. ‘You already know?’

‘Louise told us.’

They’ve been asking questions about me. Even before I got home, they were talking to my secretary.

‘She told us your plane was supposed to land at five P.M. at Logan,’ said Rizzoli. ‘It’s now nearly ten o’clock. Where’ve you been?’

‘We had a late departure from Charles de Gaulle. Something about extra security checks. The airlines are so paranoid, we were lucky just to get off the ground three hours late.’

‘So your departure was three hours delayed.’

‘I just told you that.’

‘What time did you land?’

‘I don’t know. About eight thirty.’

‘It took you an hour and a half to get home from Logan?’

‘My suitcase didn’t show up. I had to file a claims form with Air France.’ Maura stopped, suddenly at her limit. ‘Look, goddamn it, what is this all about? Before I answer any more questions, I have a right to know. Are you accusing me of something?’

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‘No, Doc. We’re not accusing you of anything. We’re just trying to figure out the time frame.’

‘Time frame for what?’

Frost said, ‘Have you received any threats, Dr Isles?’

She looked at him in bewilderment. ‘What?’

‘Do you know anyone who might have reason to hurt you?’

‘No.’

‘You’re sure?’

Maura gave a frustrated laugh. ‘Well, is anyone *ever* sure?’

‘You must have had a few cases in court where your testimony pissed off someone,’ said Rizzoli.

‘Only if they’re pissed off by the truth.’

‘You’ve made enemies in court. Perps you’ve helped convict.’

‘I’m sure you have too, Jane. Just by doing your job.’

‘Have you received any specific threats? Any letters or phone calls?’

‘My phone number’s unlisted. And Louise never gives out my address.’

‘What about letters sent to you at the medical examiner’s office?’

‘There’s been the occasional weird letter. We all get them.’

‘Weird?’

‘People writing about space aliens or conspiracies. Or accusing us of trying to cover up the truth about an autopsy. We just put those letters in

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the screwball file. Unless there's an overt threat, in which case we refer it to the police.'

Maura saw Frost scribble in his notebook, and she wondered what he had written. By now she was so angry, she wanted to reach across the coffee table and snatch the notebook out of his hands.

'Doc,' said Rizzoli quietly, 'do you have a sister?'

The question, so out of the blue, startled Maura and she stared at Rizzoli, her irritation suddenly forgotten. 'Excuse me?'

'Do you have a sister?'

'Why are you asking that?'

'I just need to know.'

Maura released a sharp breath. 'No, I don't have a sister. And you know that I'm adopted. When the hell are you going to tell me what this is all about?'

Rizzoli and Frost looked at each other.

Frost closed his notebook. 'I guess it's time to show her.'

Rizzoli led the way to the front door. Maura stepped outside, into a warm summer night that was lit up like a garish carnival by the flashing lights from the cruisers. Her body was still functioning on Paris time, where it was now four A.M., and she saw everything through a haze of exhaustion, the night as surreal as a bad dream. The instant she emerged from her house, all faces turned to stare at her. She saw her neighbors gathered across the street, watching her across the

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crime scene tape. As medical examiner, she was accustomed to being in the public eye, her every move followed by both police and media, but tonight the attention was somehow different. More intrusive, even frightening. She was glad to have Rizzoli and Frost flanking her, as though to shield her from curious eyes as they moved down the sidewalk, toward the dark Ford Taurus parked at the curb in front of Mr Telushkin's house.

Maura did not recognize the car, but she did recognize the bearded man standing beside it, his thick hands gloved in latex. It was Dr Abe Bristol, her colleague from the M.E.'s office. Abe was a man of hearty appetites, and his girth reflected his love of rich foods, his belly spilling over his belt in flabby excess. He stared at Maura and said, 'Christ, it's uncanny. Could've fooled me.' He nodded toward the car. 'I hope you're ready for this, Maura.'

Ready for what?

She looked at the parked Taurus. Saw, backlit by the flashing lights, the silhouette of a figure slumped over the steering wheel. Black splatters obscured the windshield. *Blood.*

Rizzoli shone her flashlight on the passenger door. At first, Maura did not understand what she was supposed to be looking at; her attention was still focused on the blood-spattered window, and the shadowy occupant in the driver's seat. Then she saw what Rizzoli's Maglite beam was shining on. Just below the door handle were three parallel scratches, carved deep into the car's finish.

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‘Like a claw mark,’ said Rizzoli, curling her fingers as though to trace the scar.

Maura stared at the marks. Not a claw, she thought as a chill ran up her back. *A raptor’s talon.*

‘Come around to the driver’s side,’ said Rizzoli.

Maura asked no questions as she followed Rizzoli around the rear of the Taurus.

‘Massachusetts license plate,’ Rizzoli said, her flashlight beam sweeping across the rear bumper, but it was just a detail mentioned in passing; Rizzoli continued around to the driver’s side of the car. There she paused and looked at Maura.

‘This is what got us all so shook up,’ she said. She aimed her flashlight into the car.

The beam fell squarely on the woman’s face, which stared toward the window. Her right cheek rested against the steering wheel; her eyes were open.

Maura could not speak. She gaped at the ivory skin, the black hair, the full lips, slightly parted, as though in surprise. She reeled backward, her limbs suddenly boneless, and she had the dizzying sense that she was floating away, her body no longer anchored to the earth. A hand grasped her arm, steadying her. It was Father Brophy, standing right behind her. She had not even noticed he was there.

Now she understood why everyone had been so stunned by her arrival. She stared at the corpse in the car, at the face illuminated by Rizzoli’s flashlight beam.

It’s me. That woman is me.

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Two

She sat on the couch, sipping vodka and soda, the ice cubes clattering in her glass. To hell with plain water; this shock called for sterner medicine, and Father Brophy had been understanding enough to mix her a strong drink, handing it to her without comment. It's not every day you see yourself dead. Not every day you walk onto a crime scene and encounter your lifeless doppelgänger.

'It's just a coincidence,' she whispered. 'The woman looks like me, that's all. A lot of women have black hair. And her face – how can you really see her face in that car?'

'I don't know, Doc,' said Rizzoli. 'The resemblance is pretty scary.' She sank into the easy chair, groaning as the cushions swallowed up her heavily pregnant frame. Poor Rizzoli, thought Maura. Women who are eight months pregnant should not be dragging themselves through homicide investigations.

'Her hairstyle is different,' said Maura.

'A little longer, that's all.'

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