



The Survivors Club

Lisa Gardner

LISA GARDNER

*The
Survivors
Club*

BANTAM BOOKS

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Acknowledgments

As a general rule, I enjoy researching all of my novels. Murder, mayhem, investigative procedure it's all good stuff. This time around, however, I had a particularly wonderful experience, and for that I'm deeply indebted to the Rhode Island State Police. Not only are they one of the best law enforcement agencies in the country, but they are also helpful, generous and patient people. From explaining the proper protocol for rendering a salute to demonstrating the new AFIS technology, the officers went out of their way to answer my questions and impress upon me the pride they have in their organization. It worked. I'm very impressed by the RI State Police, and I have even started following the speed limit. Well, okay, so the latter half only lasted for a bit. I tried and that says something about their powers of persuasion right there.

Of course, as with all novels, I promptly warped most of the information they graciously provided. In this novel you'll find police procedure and forensics testing happening at approximately the speed of light. Also, my police detectives are perhaps a tad rougher around the edges and a bit more familiar with murder suspects than their real-life counterparts. Remember, the RI State Police detectives have real jobs. I, on the other hand, am a fiction writer who makes things up.

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double-chocolate brownies that saved the day.

Once again, all mistakes in the novel are mine. Anything you think is particularly brilliant I'll take
responsibility for as well.

Happy reading!
Lisa Gardner

PROLOGUE

Eddie

IT STARTED AS A CONVERSATION:

“The scientists are the problem—not the cops. Cops are just cops. Some got a nose for jelly doughnuts; others got a nose for pensions. The scientists, though . . . I read about this case where they nailed a guy by matching the inside seam of his blue jeans with a bloody print left at the murder scene. I’m not kidding. Some expert testified that the wear pattern of denim is so individual there’s something like a one-in-a-billion chance that another pair of jeans would leave the same print, yada, yada, yada. Fuckin’ unreal.”

“Don’t wear blue jeans,” the second man said.

The first man, a kid really, rolled his eyes. “That’s fuckin’ brilliant.”

The second man shrugged. “Before you lecture me about Calvin’s sending someone to the big house, perhaps we should start with the basics. Fingerprints.”

“Gloves,” the kid said immediately.

“Gloves?” The man frowned. “And here I expected something much more innovative coming from you.”

“Hey, gloves are a pain in the ass, but then again, so is serving time. What else are you gonna do?”

“I don’t know. But I don’t want to wear gloves if I don’t have to. Let’s think about it.”

“You could wipe down everything,” the kid said shortly. “Ammonia dissolves fingerprint oil, you know. You could prepare a solution, ammonia and water. Afterwards, you could spray it on, wipe stuff down. You know, including . . .” The kid’s voice trailed off. He didn’t seem quite able to say the words which the man thought was pretty funny, given everything this “kid” had done.

The man nodded. “Yes. Including. With ammonia, of course. Otherwise they might be able to print the woman’s skin using Alternate Light Source or fumigation. Instead of spritzing, the other option is to put the woman in a tub. To ensure that you’re being thorough.”

“Yeah.” The kid nodded his head, contemplating. “Still might miss a spot. And it involves a lot of

maneuvering. Remember what the textbook said: ‘The more contact with the victim, the more evidence left behind.’”

“True. Other ideas?”

“You could leave fake prints. I once met this guy from New York. His gang liked to cut off the hands of their rivals, and use them to leave false prints at their own crime scenes.”

“Did it work?”

“Well, half the gang was in Rikers at the time . . .”

“So it didn’t work.”

“Probably not.”

The man pursed his lips. “It’s an interesting thought, though. Creative. The police hate creativity. We should find out where those people went wrong.”

“I’ll ask around.”

“A fingerprint is nothing but a ridge pattern,” the man thought out loud. “Fill in the valleys between the ridges and there’s no more print. Seems like there’s gotta be a way of doing that. Maybe smearing the fingertips with superglue? I’ve heard of it, but I don’t know if it works.”

“Wouldn’t that interfere with feel, though? I mean, if you’re going to lose sensation, you might as well return to gloves which you know will do the trick.”

“There’s scarring. Repeated cutting of the fingertips with a razor to obscure the print.”

“No thank you!”

“No pain, no gain,” the man said mildly.

“Yeah, and no pleasure, no point. What do you think scar tissue is gonna do to the nerve endings on your fingertips? Might as well hack ’em off and be done with it. Keep it simple, remember? Another thing the textbook pointed out—simple is good.”

The man shrugged. “Fine, then it’s gloves. Thinnest latex possible. That resolves the matter of fingerprints. Next issue: DNA.”

“Shit,” the kid said.

“DNA is the kicker,” the man agreed. “With fingerprints you can watch what you touch. But with DNA . . . Now you have to consider your hair, your blood, your semen, your spit. Oh, and bite marks. Let’s not forget about the power of dental matches.”

“Jesus, you are a sick son of a bitch.” The kid rolled his eyes again. “Look, don’t bite anything

anyone. It's too risky. They've nailed thieves by matching their teeth to indentations left in a hunk of cheddar in the fridge. After that, God knows what they can do with a human breast."

"Fair enough. Now back to DNA."

"Pull an O.J.," the kid said grumpily. "Let the lawyers deal with it."

"You really think lawyers are that good, all things considered . . ." The man's tone was droll.

The kid got hostile. "Hey, what the fuck is a guy supposed to do? Wear a goddamn condom? Hell, man, might as well fuck a garden hose."

"Then we need a better idea. Blaming the cops is no kind of defense. They don't handle the DNA anyway. The hospital sends it straight to the Department of Health via a courier. Or don't you read the paper?"

"I read—"

"And a bath won't help there either," the man continued relentlessly. "Just look at Motyka. He stuck the woman in a tub and that worked so well he's now facing life in prison. The semen goes up into the body. You need something more, some kind of flush action, I don't know. Plus there's the hair. Hair can also yield DNA, if they get a root, or they can simply match hair at the scene to hair on your head. Bathtub won't help with hair, either. Some anal-retentive crime tech will retrieve your hair from the drainpipes—they can retrieve blood samples from there too, you know. You can't approach this half-assed."

"Shave."

"Everywhere?"

"Yes." The kid's tone was grudging. "Yeah, shit. Everywhere. Tell people you're into swimming. What the fuck."

"Shaving is good," the man conceded. "That resolves the hair. What else? They'll swab the woman's mouth. Remember that."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah, I read the same book you did."

"No touching anything with your bare hands—not even an eyeball."

"I read about that case, too."

"No blue jeans, I guess."

"Wear dust covers over your shoes to limit soil and fiber," the kid added. "And, whenever possible, resort to social engineering. Breaking and entering leaves behind tool marks, and tool marks can also be matched."

The man nodded: “That covers most of the trace evidence except for DNA then. We still need to figure out DNA. They get one little sample of semen, send it to the DNA database . . .”

“I know, I know.” The kid closed his eyes. He appeared to be thinking. Hard. He finally opened them again. “You could try confusing the issue. There was that guy who was arrested as a serial rapist based on DNA, then while he was in prison, another rape was reported with the same kind of DNA found on the girl’s panties.”

“What happened?”

The kid sighed. “They busted the guy in prison for that, too. Perpetrating fraud, something like that.”

“He raped the other girl while he was behind bars?”

“No, man, he jacked off into a ketchup packet while he was behind bars, then mailed it to a friend who paid a girl fifty bucks to smear the stuff on her underwear and cry rape. You know, so it would appear like there was another guy running around with the same DNA, who was actually the rapist.”

“There is no such thing as two guys with the same DNA. Not even identical twins have the same DNA.”

“Yeah, and that would be the problem with the plan. The scientists knew that and the prosecution knew that, so they pressured the girl until she confessed what really happened.”

“Is there a moral to this story?”

“Pay the girl more than fifty bucks!”

The man sighed. “That is not a good plan.”

“Hey, you wanted an idea, I gave you an idea.”

“I wanted a good idea.”

“Ah, fuck you, too.”

The second man didn’t say anything. The kid lapsed into silence as well.

“Gotta beat the DNA,” the kid muttered after a bit.

“Gotta beat the DNA,” the man agreed.

“The Raincoat on your John Thomas,” the kid mocked from Monty Python. “Ah, who needs it?”

“Wouldn’t necessarily help anyway. Condoms leak, condoms break. Police are also getting better at tracing the lubricants and spermicide. That gives them a brand, then they start checking stores and the next thing you know some pharmacy worker just happened to notice some guy buying some box . . .”

“You’re screwed.”

“Yeah. Those scientists. Any little thing you introduce into the scene . . .”

The kid suddenly perked up. “Hey,” he said. “I have an idea.”

CHAPTER 1

Jersey

THE BLONDE CAUGHT IN THE SIGHTS OF THE LEUPOLD Vari-X III 1.5–5 x 20mm Matte Duplex Illuminated Reticle scope didn't seem to fear for her life. At the moment, in fact, she was doing her hair. Now she had out a black compact and was checking her lipstick, a light, pearly pink. Jersey adjusted the Leupold scope as the reporter pursed her lips for her own reflection and practiced an alluring pout. Next to her, her cameraman let his heavy video equipment fall from his shoulder to the ground and rolled his eyes. Apparently, he recognized this drill and knew it would be a while.

Ten feet away from the blonde, another reporter, this one male—WNAC-TV, home of the *Forecast*, because heaven forbid anyone call it a *forecast* anymore—was meticulously picking pieces of lint off of his mud-brown suit. His cameraman sat in the grass, sipping Dunkin' Donut coffee and blinking sleepily. On the other side of the stone pillar that dominated the sprawling World War Memorial Park, a dozen other reporters were scattered about, double-checking their copy, double-checking their appearance, yawning tiredly, then double-checking the street.

Eight-oh-one A.M., Monday morning. At least twenty-nine minutes until the blue van from Adult Correctional Institutions (ACI) was due to arrive at the Licht Judicial Complex in downtown Providence and everyone was bored. Hell, Jersey was bored. He'd been camped out on the roof of the sprawling brick courthouse since midnight last night. And damn, it got *cold* at night this early in March. Three Army blankets, a black coverall, and black leather Bob Allen shooting gloves and he still shivered until the sun came up. That was a little before six, meaning he'd had two and a half more hours to kill and not even the chance to stand up and stretch without giving his position away.

Jersey had spent the night—and now the morning—hunkered behind a two-foot-high decorative brick trim piece that lined this section of the courthouse's roof. The faux railing afforded him just enough cover to remain invisible to people in the courtyard below, and more importantly, to the reporters camped in the grassy memorial park across the street. The railing also offered the perfect rifle stand, for when the moment came.

Sometime between 8:30 and 9:00 A.M., the blue ACI van would pull up. The eight-foot-high wrought-iron gate that surrounded the inner courtyard of the judicial complex would open up. The van would pull in. The gate would swing shut. The van doors would open. And then . . .

Jersey's finger twitched on the trigger of the heavy barrel AR15. He caught himself, then eased his grip on the assault rifle, slightly surprised by his antsiness. It wasn't like him to rush. Calm and

controlled, he told himself. Easy does it. Nothing here he hadn't done before. Nothing here he couldn't handle.

Jersey had been hunting since the time he could walk, the scent of gunpowder as reassuring to him as talcum. Following in his father's footsteps, he'd joined the Army at the age of eighteen, then spent eight years honing his abilities with an M16. Not to brag, but Jersey could take out targets at five hundred yards most guys couldn't hit at one hundred. He was also a member of the Quarter Inch Club—at two hundred yards, he could cluster three shots within a quarter-inch triangulation of one another. His father had been an American sniper in 'Nam, so Jersey figured that shooting was in his genes.

Five years ago, seeking a better lifestyle than the Army could afford him, he'd opened shop. He used a double-blind policy. The clients never knew his name, he never knew theirs. A first middleman contacted a second middleman who contacted Jersey. Money was wired to appropriate accounts. Dossiers bearing pertinent information were sent to temporary P.O. boxes opened at various MAIL BOXES ETC. stores under various aliases. Jersey had a rule about not hitting women or children. Some days he thought that made him a good person. Other days he thought that made him worse because he used that policy to try to prove to himself that he did have a conscience when the bottom line was, well, you know—he killed people for money.

If his father knew, he definitely wouldn't approve.

This gig had come along five months ago. Jersey had been instantly intrigued. For one thing, the target was a genuine, bona fide rapist, so Jersey didn't have to worry about his conscience. For another thing, the job was in Providence, and Jersey had always wanted to visit the Ocean State. He'd made four separate trips to the city to scope out the job, and thus far, he liked what he saw.

Providence was a small city, bisected by the Providence River, where, no kidding, they ran gondola rides on select Friday and Saturday nights. The slick black boats looked straight out of Venice, and the mayor even had a bunch of good ol' Italian boys manning the vessels in black-striped shirts and red-banded strawhats. Then there was this thing called WaterFire, where they lit bonfires in the middle of the river. You could sit out at your favorite restaurant and watch the river burn while tourists bounced around the flames in gondolas. Jersey had been secretly hoping someone would catch on fire, but he knew that was just him.

The city was pretty. This courthouse, on the east side of the river, was an impressive red-brick structure with a soaring white clock tower that dominated an entire city block. Old world colonial meets new world grandeur. The front of the courthouse sat on Benefit Street, which seemed to be a mile-long advertisement for old money—huge historical homes featuring everything from Victorian turrets to Gothic stone, interspersed with green lawns and neatly constructed brick walls. The back of the courthouse, where Jersey was, overlooked the sprawling memorial park, the grassy expanse littered with dignified bronze sculptures of soldiers and significantly less dignified pieces of modern art. The modern art carried over to the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), with its urban campus stretching alongside the courthouse.

Rhode Island didn't have much in the way of violent crime. Thirty homicides a year, something like that. Of course, that would change today. The state was better known for its long history of financial

crimes, Mafia connections and political corruption. As the locals liked to say, in Rhode Island it isn't what you know, but who you know. And in all honesty, everyone did seem to know one another in the state. Frankly, it freaked Jersey out.

Jersey started to yawn again, caught it this time and forced himself to snap to attention. Eight twenty-one A.M. now. Not much longer. On the grass across the street, the various news teams were beginning to stir.

Last night, before coming to the courthouse, Jersey had sat in his hotel room and flipped back and forth between all the local news shows, trying to learn the various media personalities. He didn't recognize the pretty blonde down below, though her cameraman's shirt indicated that they were with WJAR, News Team 10, the local NBC affiliate. Network news. That was respectable. Jersey was happy for her.

Then he wondered if the woman had any idea just how big her morning was about to become. Her target, Eddie Como, aka the College Hill Rapist, was major news in the Ocean State. Everyone was here to cover the start of the trial. Everyone was here to capture shots of slightly built, hunched-shouldered Eddie, or maybe get a glimpse of one of his three beautiful victims.

These reporters didn't know anything yet. About Jersey. About his client. About what was really going to happen this sunny Monday morning in May. It made Jersey feel benevolent toward all the bored, overhyped, overgroomed individuals gathered on the grass below. He had a treat for them. He was about to make one of them, some of them, very special.

Take this pretty little blonde with the pearly pink lips. She was up first thing this morning, armed with canned copy and thinking that at best, she'd get a shot of the blue ACI van for the morning news at her station. Of course, the other twenty reporters would shoot the same visual with pretty much the same copy, nobody being any better than anyone else, and nobody being any worse. Just another day on the job, covering what needed to be covered for all the enquiring minds that wanted to know.

Except that someone down in that park, sitting on the grass, surrounded by war memorials and freakish exhibits of modern art, was going to get a scoop this morning. Someone, maybe that pretty little blonde, was going to show up to get a routine clip of a blue ACI van, and come away with a picture of a hired gun instead.

There was no way around it. The only time Jersey would have access to Eddie Como was when the alleged rapist was moved from the ACI to the Licht Judicial Complex on the opening day of his trial. And the only time Jersey would have access at the Licht Judicial Complex was when Eddie was unloaded from the ACI van within a fenced-off drop-off roughly the size of a two-car garage. And the only way Jersey could shoot into a drop-off zone enclosed by an eight-foot-high fence was to shoot down at the target.

The massive red-brick courthouse took up an entire city block. Soaring up to sixteen stories high with swooping red-brick wings, it towered above its fellow buildings and zealously protected its back courtyard and the all-important drop-off zone. So Jersey's options had been clear from the beginning. He would have to access the courthouse itself, easily done in the cover of night once he learned the

routine of the Capital Security guards.

He would have to take up position on the sixth-story roofline immediately overlooking the drop-off point to have a clean shot down into the fenced-off area. He would have to line up the shot in the cover of darkness. And then, when the van finally arrived sometime between 8:30 and 9:00 A.M., he would have five seconds to stand, blow off the top of Eddie Como's head and start running.

Because while the state marshals who escorted the inmates probably wouldn't be able to see him—the angle would be too steep—and while the prisoners themselves wouldn't be able to see him—they would probably be too busy screaming at all the brains now sprayed in their hair—the reporters, even a single greedy, desperate-for-a-scoop reporter camped across the street—they would have a clear view of Jersey standing six stories up. Jersey firing a rifle six stories up. Jersey running across the van roofline six stories up.

The shot itself was going to be easy. A mere seventy feet. Straight down. Hell, Jersey should forget the assault rifle and drop an anvil on the guy's head. Yeah, the shot itself was downright boring. But the moments afterward . . . The moments afterward were going to be really entertaining.

A disturbance down the street. Jersey flicked back to the pretty blonde in time to see her drop her lipstick and scramble forward. Show time.

He glanced at his watch. Eight thirty-five A.M. Apparently, the state marshals didn't want to keep the reporters waiting.

Jersey brought his rifle back down against him. He adjusted the scope to 1.5, all he would need for a seventy-foot head shot. He checked the twenty-cartridge magazine, then chambered the first round. He was using Winchester's .223 Remington, a 55-grain soft-point bullet, which according to the box was best for shooting prairie dogs, coyotes and woodchucks.

And now, the College Hill Rapist.

Jersey got on his knees. He positioned the rifle along the top of the rail, then placed his eye against the scope. He could just make out the street through the stone archways lining the outer courtyard. He heard, more than saw, the black wrought-iron fence of the inner courtyard swing open. Calm and controlled. Easy does it. Nothing here he hadn't done before. Nothing here he couldn't handle.

He flexed his fingers. He listened to the reassuring crinkle of his black leather shooting gloves . . .

The prisoners would be shackled together like a chain gang. Most would be in khaki or blue prison overalls. But Eddie Como would be different. Facing the first day of trial, Eddie Como would arrive in a suit.

Jersey waited for the barking sound of a state marshal ordering the unloading of the van. He felt the first prick of sweat. But he didn't pop up. He still didn't squeeze the trigger.

Twenty reporters and cameramen across the street. Twenty journalists just waiting for their big break . . .

“Courtyard secure! Door open!”

Jersey heard the rasp of metal as the van door slid back. He heard the slap of the first rubber-soled shoe hitting the flagstone patio . . .

One, two, three, four, five . . .

Jersey rocketed up from his knees and angled the AR15 twenty-two degrees from vertical. Searching, searching . . .

The dark head of Eddie Como emerged from the van. He was gazing forward, looking at the door to the courthouse. His shoulders were down. He took three shuffling steps forward—

And Jersey blew off the top of his head. One moment Eddie Como was standing shackled between two guys. The next he was folding up silently and plummeting to the hard, slate-covered ground.

Jersey let the black-market rifle fall to the roof. Then he began to run.

He was aware of so many things at once. The feel of the sun on his face. The smell of cordite in the air. The noise of a city about to start a busy workweek, cars roaring, cars screeching. And then, almost as an afterthought, people beginning to scream.

“Gun, gun, gun!”

“Get down, get down!”

“Look! Up there. On the roof!”

Jersey was smiling. Jersey was feeling good. He clambered across the courthouse roof, the gummed soles of his rock-climbing shoes finding perfect traction. He turned the corner and rounded the cent-clock tower, which rose another several stories. *Now you see me. Now you don't.*

Shots fired. Some overpumped state marshals shooting their wad at an enemy they couldn't see.

Jersey's smile grew. He hummed now as he stripped off his gloves and cast them behind him. Almost at the rooftop door. He grabbed the front of his black coveralls with his left hand and popped open the snaps. Three seconds later, the black coveralls joined his discarded rifle and gloves on the rooftop. Five seconds after that, Jersey had replaced his rock climber's shoes with highly polished Italian loafers. Then it was a simple matter of reclaiming the black leather briefcase he'd left by the rooftop door. Last night, the briefcase had contained the dismantled parts of an AR15. This morning, it held only business papers.

From world-class sniper to just one more guy in a suit in five minutes or less.

Jersey pulled open the rooftop door. He'd jammed the lock with wire last night so it would be ready for him. Moments later, he was down the stairs and joining the main traffic flow, just another harried lawyer too busy to look anyone in the eye.

Capital Security guards and state marshals rushed by. People inside the courthouse were looking around, becoming increasingly aware that something had happened but not sure what. Jersey following their example, pasted a slightly puzzled expression on his face as he journeyed forth.

Another gray-clad marshal sprinted by him, voices screaming from the radio at the man's waist. He hit Jersey's shoulder, knocking him back. Jersey spluttered, "Excuse me!" The state marshal kept running for the stairs leading to the roof.

"What happened?" a lady walking next to Jersey asked.

"I'm not sure," he said. "Must be something bad."

They exchanged vigorous nods. And thirty-two seconds later, Jersey was out the front door, taking left and heading back down steeply pitched College Street toward the memorial park. He resumed humming now, in the homestretch. Even if some police officer stopped him, what would the officer find? Jersey had no weapons, no trace of gunpowder on his hands or clothes. He was just a businessman, and he always carried valid ID.

The screech of sirens abruptly split the air. The city wasn't big and the Providence Police had their headquarters downtown. Cops would be streaming in from all over, roadblocks just a matter of time. Jersey picked up his step but remained calm. His thoughtful client, no doubt familiar with the parking crunch in downtown Providence, had sent Jersey a RISD visitor's pass for the parking lot just across the street. The cops would be here in two minutes. Jersey would be gone in one.

The sirens roared closer. Jersey arrived at the tiny college parking lot at the base of College Street and South Main. Found his key for the blue rental car. Unlocked the doors, threw in his briefcase, slid into the seat.

Calm and controlled. Easy does it. Nothing here he hadn't done before. Nothing here he couldn't handle.

Jersey turned the key in the ignition. And then, he heard the *click*.

One frozen instant in time. His eyes widening, his bewilderment honest. But, but, the double-blind policy. Nobody knew his name. He never knew theirs. How could, how could . . .

And then his eyes went to the red visitor's parking pass hanging from his rental-car mirror, the lone visitor's pass in a minuscule city parking lot of only twenty vehicles.

His client's thoughtfulness . . .

Calm and controlled, Jersey thought helplessly. Easy does it. Nothing here he hadn't done before. Nothing here he couldn't handle . . .

The current from the car's starter box hit the electrical ignition switch of the custom-made bomb and Jersey's rental car exploded into the bright morning sky.

A dozen city blocks away, on Hope Street, the well-groomed patrons of the trendy restaurant rue d'Espoir—made even trendier by its all-lowercase name—looked up from their decadent business breakfasts of eggs Benedict and inch-thick slices of French toast. Sitting in comfy booths, they no longer gazed around the rich, earthy interior where the walls were the same color as aged copper pots and the booths were decorated in hues of red, green, brown and eggplant. The tremor, though slight, had been unmistakable. Even the waitresses had stopped in their tracks.

“Did you feel that?” one of the servers asked.

The people in the chic little restaurant looked at each other. They had just started to shrug away the minor disturbance when the harsh sound of screaming sirens cut the air. Two cop cars went flying down the street. An ambulance roared by in their wake.

“Something must have happened,” someone said.

“Something big,” another patron echoed.

Sitting at a small table tucked alone in the far corner, three women finally looked up from their oversized mugs of spiced chai. Two were older, one was younger. All three had caused a minor stir when they had walked through the door. Now the women looked at one another. Then, simultaneously, they looked away.

“I wonder,” said one.

“Don't,” said another.

And that was all they said.

Until the cops came.

CHAPTER 2

Griffin

AT 8:31 A.M. MONDAY MORNING, RHODE ISLAND STATE Police Detective Sergeant Roan Griffin was already late for his 8:30 briefing. This was not a good thing. It was his first day back on the job in eighteen months. He should probably be on time. Hell, he should probably be early. Show up at headquarters at 8:15 A.M., pumped up, sharply pressed, crisply saluting. *Here I am, I am ready.*

And then . . . ?

“Welcome back,” they would greet him. (Hopefully.)

“Thanks,” he would say. (Probably.)

“How are you feeling?” they’d ask. (Suspiciously.)

“Good,” he’d reply. (Too easily.)

Ah, shit. Good was a stupid answer. Too often said to be often believed. He’d say good, and they’d stare at him harder, trying to read between the lines. Good like you’re ready to crack open a case file or good like we can trust you with a loaded firearm? It was an interesting question.

He drummed his fingers on the steering wheel and tried again.

“Welcome back,” they’d say.

“It’s good to be back,” he’d say.

“How are you doing?” they’d ask.

“My anxiety is operating within normal parameters,” he’d reply.

No. Absolutely not. That kind of psychobabble made even him want to whoop his ass. Forget it. He should’ve gone with his father’s recommendation and walked in wearing a T-shirt that read “You’re Only Jealous Because the Voices are Talking to Me.”

At least they all could’ve had a good laugh.

Griffin had joined the Rhode Island State Police force sixteen years ago. He'd started with four months in a rigorous boot camp, learning everything from evasive driving maneuvers to engaging hand-to-hand combat after being stung with pepper spray. (You want to know pain? Having pepper spray in your eyes is pain. You want to know self-control? Standing there willingly to be sprayed for the *second* time, that is self-control.) Following boot camp, Griffin had spent eight years in uniform. He'd boosted the state coffers writing his share of speeding tickets. He'd helped motorists change tires. He'd attended dozens of motor vehicle accidents, including way too many involving children. Then he'd joined the Detective Bureau, starting in Intelligence, where he'd earned a stellar reputation for his efforts on a major FBI case. Following that, he worked some money laundering, gunrunning, art forgery, homicide. Rhode Island may not have a large quantity of crime, but as the detectives like to say, they got quality crime.

Griffin had been a good detective. Bright. Hardheaded. Stubborn. Ferocious at times. Funny to others. This stuff was in his blood. His grandfather had been a beat cop in New York. His father had served as sheriff in North Kingstown. Two of his brothers were now state marshals. Years ago, when Griffin had first met Cindy on a hiking trip in New Hampshire, first looked into her eyes and felt her smile like a thunderbolt in his chest, he'd blurted out, before his name, before even hello, "I'm a cop." Fortunately for him, Cindy had understood.

Griffin had been a good detective. Guys liked working with him. The brass liked giving him cases. The media liked following his career. He went on the Dave Letterman show when the Rhode Island State Police won a nationwide award for best uniform. He led Operation Pinto, which shut down a major auto-theft ring in a blaze of front-page *Providence Journal* headlines. He even got appointed to the governor's task force on community policing, probably because the little old ladies had been asking for him since he'd strutted across Letterman's sound stage. (Officer Blue Eyes, the *ProJo* had dubbed him. Oh yeah, his fellow detectives had definitely had that made into a T-shirt.)

Two and a half years ago, when the third kid vanished from Wakefield and the pattern of a local operating child predator became clear, there had never been any doubt that Griffin would head the investigation. He remembered being excited when he'd walked out of that briefing. He remembered the thrum of adrenaline in his veins, the flex of his muscles, the heady sense that he had once again begun a chase.

Two days before Cindy went for a routine checkup. Six months before everything went from bad to worse. Eleven months before he learned the true nature of the black abyss.

For the record, he'd nailed that son of a bitch. For the record.

Griffin made the left-hand fork on Route 6, headed into North Scituate. Five minutes from headquarters now. He drove by the giant reservoir as the landscape opened up to reveal a vast expanse of water on his right and rolling green hills on his left. Soon he'd see joggers, guys grabbing their morning run. Then would come the state police compound. First, the flat, ugly 1960s brown building that housed Investigative Support Services. Then, the huge old gray barn in the back, a remnant of what the property used to be. Finally, the beautiful old white semimansion that now served as state police headquarters, complete with a gracefully curving staircase and bay windows overlooking more rolling green hills. The White House, the rookies called it. Where the big boys lived.

Damn, he'd missed this place. Damn.

"Welcome back, Griffin," they'd say.

"Thanks," he'd say.

"How are you feeling?" they'd ask.

And he'd answer—

In the left-hand lane, a blue Ford Taurus roared past, red lights flashing behind the grille. Then came two more unmarked police cars, sirens also screaming. What the hell?

Griffin turned into the parking lot of state police headquarters just in time to see detectives pour out of ISSB and race for their state steels. He recognized two guys from the Criminal Identification Unit (CIU), Jack Cappelli and Jack Needham, aka Jack-n-Jack, climbing into the big gray crime-scene investigation van. Then they had flipped on the lights and were peeling out of the lot.

Griffin swung in front of the ISS building. He hadn't even cut the motor before Lieutenant Marco Morelli of Major Crimes was banging on his window.

"Lieutenant." He started to salute. Morelli cut him off.

"Providence just called in reports of rifle fire and a major explosion at the Licht Judicial Complex. ATF and the state fire marshal get the explosion. We get the shooting. All units respond."

"A shooting at the *courthouse*?" His eyebrows shot up. No friggin' way.

"You been following the Como case? Sounds like somebody got tired of waiting for the trial. Better yet, the media's already there, catching the before and the after. Can you say 'Film at eleven'?"

"Somebody up there hates you, Lieutenant."

"No kidding. Look, whatever just happened, we know it's going to be big. I've already asked the detective commander for additional resources, plus I want all of Major Crimes down there ASAP. The uniforms can handle the canvassing, but I want you guys on initial interviews. Find out when, where, why, how, radio it to every uniform in the area so they can be on the lookout for the shooter, and help catch this guy yesterday. You know the drill." Morelli paused long enough to take a breath, then narrowed her eyes as, for the first time, she truly saw his seated form. "Jesus Christ, Griffin, I thought you'd spent the time fishing or something like that."

"Well yeah. And some weights." He shrugged modestly.

"Uh huh."

"And some running."

"Uh huh."

“Okay, boxing, too.”

The lieutenant rolled her eyes. Griffin had spent the last year of his eighteen-month medical leave mastering the art of sublimation—funneling nonproductive tension into a productive outlet. He gotten pretty good at it. He could sustain a five-minute mile for nearly ten miles. He could box sixteen rounds. He could bench-press a Volvo.

His body was good. His face was still a little too harsh—a man not sleeping well at night. But physically . . . Griffin was a lean, mean machine.

The lieutenant straightened. “Well,” she said briskly, “The Boss is on his way. So get moving, Sergeant. And remember, there are only a hundred cameras about to document every step we take.”

Lieutenant Morelli resumed running. Griffin sat there for one more moment, honestly a little dazed. *My anxiety is operating within normal parameters*, he thought stupidly. Ah fuck it. Back is back. He flipped on his lights and joined his fellow officers, roaring toward Providence.

CHAPTER 3

Jillian

SHE IS DRIVING TO HER SISTER'S APARTMENT. WORK HAS held her up, she is running an hour late. Traffic is miserable, of course. Another accident on 195, when isn't there an accident? She is thinking about all the things she still has to get done. Cash-flow analysis of the first six months. Cash-flow projection for the next six months. Storyboards for Roger. Copy proofs for Claire.

Toppi called her at work to say that Libby was having a bad day. Please don't stay out too late.

She is driving to her sister's apartment, but she is not thinking about her sister. She is not looking forward to dinner with Trish. It has become one more thing to do on a long list of things to do, and part of her suspects that this is bad. She has lost perspective. She has let her life get away from her. The rest of her is too busy to care.

She has her responsibilities. She is the responsible one.

Trisha is off to college. Trisha has her first apartment, tiny, cramped, but beautiful because it is all hers. Trisha has new friends, new life, new goals. She wants to be a playwright, she told Jillian excitedly last week. Before that she had wanted to study communications. Before that it had been English. Trish is young, beautiful, bright. The world is her oyster, and Jillian does not doubt that Trisha will become exactly who she wants to become, doing exactly what she wants to do.

And this pains her in a way she doesn't understand. Lifts her up, pushes her down. She is the surrogate mother, proud of her child's accomplishments. She is the tired older sister, feeling a nagging twinge of jealousy when she has nothing to be jealous of. Yes, her path was harder. No, she was never nineteen and carefree. No, she has never gotten to live on her own, not even now. But she went to college, earned a business degree. At thirty-six she runs a successful ad agency, calling all the shots. She didn't sacrifice everything for her mother and sister. She carved out her own life, too.

And yet . . .

Visiting Trish is hard for her these days. She does not do it nearly as often as she should.

Now, she drives around Thayer Street, looking for a place to park. The third week in May, the sun is just starting to set and the sidewalks are crowded with Brown University summer students, milling outside of Starbucks, the Gap store, Abercrombie & Fitch. Jillian still gets a twinge of unease over

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