

#1 *NEW YORK TIMES*—BESTSELLING AUTHOR

J. D. ROBB

OBSESSION IN DEATH



TITLES BY J. D. ROBB

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OBSESSION IN DEATH



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Some dire misfortune to porten

No enemy can match a frien

—JONATHAN SWI

But Evil saith to Good: My brother .

—ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBUR

PROLOGUE

Killing was easier than I thought it could be, and a lot more rewarding. I finally feel as if I've done something important, something that deserves real attention. All my life I've tried, done my best, but no one ever truly appreciated my efforts, really saw me for who and what I was.

I can say objectively, honestly, I did a good and efficient job on this new, important project, start to finish.

There were times during the weeks and weeks—months really—of planning, of selecting, of working out all the tiny details, I felt impatient, even annoyed with myself.

There were times I doubted, times I nearly lost my courage and my focus. It's too easy to become discouraged when no one values your skills and your efforts.

But I see now this time (and maybe it's been years in the developing really) was all worth it.

The time spent will be worth it again, as all that preparation and planning is done on all who come next.

Because I spent those weeks watching the target, learning her routine, made the effort to get into her building long before tonight, and made the investment in the very best equipment, practiced all the steps for hours, I have my first success.

My first weight on the scale toward balance. My first tribute, I suppose, in honor of my friend and partner.

That icy blonde bitch deserved to die.

Didn't Shakespeare say something about killing all the lawyers? I should look it up. In any case, I've taken care of one, and she won't be around to make any more money off the scum she represented, or most important of all, she'll never insult or demean the person I most admire. The person who deserved her RESPECT!

I'm honored to have played a part in righting the wrong, in bringing true justice to the woman who, due to the constraints of her job, is unable to mete out justice for herself.

I will be her avenger, her champion.

Soon, she'll know there is someone who will stand up for her, do what needs to be done. When she sees my message, she'll know she has someone behind her, who understands, admires, and respects her above all others. As no one ever did for me. Our connection is so strong, so intense, I can often read her thoughts. I wonder if she can read mine.

Sometimes, late at night, I sense she's with me, right here with me. How else could I have known where to start, and just what to do?

Ours is a spiritual bond I treasure, something deep and strong, and older than time. We are, in essence, the same person, two sides to one coin.


Death unites us.

I've proven myself now. There's still more to do, because the list is long. But tonight, I'm taking this time to write down my feelings, to have a small celebration. Tomorrow I'll go back to serving justice.

One day, when the time is right, we'll meet, and on that day, she will know she has the truest of

friends.

It will be the happiest day of my life.



On a cold, crisp morning in the waning days of 2060, Lieutenant Eve Dallas stood in a sumptuous bedroom done in bold strokes of rich purple, deep metallic grays, and quick splashes of green. Outside the ad blimps manically touted the *AFTER CHRISTMAS BLOW-OUT SALES!* and street vendors hyped fake designer wrist units and knockoff handbags to throngs of tourists packed into the city for the holiday week.

Outside life went on. Inside the plush bedroom with all its color and style, it had stopped.

An enormous arrangement of white lilies and purple roses in a tall, mirrored vase on the pedestal centered in the wide window couldn't quite mask the smell of death. Instead the fragrance layered over it, sickly sweet.

On a bed big enough for six lay the body of a woman who'd once been a stunner. Even now her meticulous style showed in the perfect coordination of silver lounging pants, silky lavender top, the perfectly manicured nails—hands and feet—with polish of dark purple on all ten digits.

Her heavily lashed eyes stared straight up to the ceiling, as if mildly puzzled.

A razor-thin, bone-deep wound circled her throat. Blood, now congealed, had spilled from that ugly curve to soil and spoil the soft gray bedding and mat in the fall of pale blond hair.

Her tongue sat in a faceted glass dish on the glossy nightstand beside the bed.

But the kicker, at least for Eve, was the message written on the wall above the thickly padded headboard, in precise block lettering, black against the gray.

FOR LIEUTENANT EVE DALLAS,
WITH GREAT ADMIRATION AND UNDERSTANDING.
HER LIFE WAS A LIE; HER DEATH OUR TRUTH.
SHE SHOWED YOU NO RESPECT, SPOKE ILL OF YOU, SOUGHT TO PROFIT BY
UNDERMINING ALL YOU WORK FOR.
IT WAS MY PLEASURE AND HONOR TO BALANCE THE SCALES.
JUSTICE HAS BEEN SERVED.
YOUR TRUE AND LOYAL FRIEND.

Beside Eve, her partner, Detective Peabody, blew out a long breath. “Holy shit, Dallas.”

Whether or not Eve thought the same, she turned to the uniformed officer in the bedroom doorway. “Who found her?”

“Her admin. The vic missed a dinner meeting last night, then didn't come in to work, where she had a morning meeting. So the admin, Cecil Haversham, came by. Nobody could reach her via 'link, she didn't answer the door. He had her codes and key pass—stated he waters her plants and whatnot when she's out of town. Let himself in at about nine-fifteen, heard the bedroom screen on like it is now, and walked through until he found her. We got the nine-one-one at nine-nineteen, so the timing works.”

“Where is he?”

“Place has a dining area you can close off. We're sitting on him there.”

“Keep sitting. I want the building's security discs, exterior, interior, and I want a canvass started, beginning with this floor.”

“Yes, sir.” He jutted his chin to the writing on the wall. “You know the vic?”

“I've had some dealings with her.” To discourage any more questions, Eve turned away.

She and Peabody had sealed up on entering the apartment. She'd turned on her recorder before stepping into the bedroom. Now she stood a moment, a tall, slim woman with short, tousled brown hair, with long-lidded eyes of gilded brown cop-flat in her angular face.

Yeah, they'd had some dealings, she thought now, and she hadn't had a modicum of liking for the victim. But it appeared she and Peabody would be spending the last days of the year standing for the

once-high-powered defense attorney who'd had—to Eve's mind—the ethics of a rattlesnake.

~~“Let's verify ID, Peabody, and keep every step of this strict on procedure.”~~

With a nod, Peabody took off her pink leather coat—Eve's Christmas gift—set it carefully aside before she pulled her Identi-pad from her field kit. With her striped pink pom-pom hat still over her flip of dark hair, she approached the body. “Victim is identified as Leanore Bastwick of this address.

“Cause of death looks pretty straightforward. Strangulation, probably a wire garrote, but the ME will confirm. Get time of death.”

Again Peabody dug into her field kit. She worked the gauges, angled, as she read Eve's unspoken order, so the record would pick up everything.

“TOD eighteen-thirty-three.”

“No sign of struggle, no visible defensive wounds or other injuries. No sign, at a glance, of forced entry. The vic's fully dressed, and there's plenty of easily transported valuables sitting out. It doesn't read sexual assault or burglary. It reads straight murder.”

Peabody lifted her gaze to the message on the wall. “Literally reads.”

“Yeah. Security discs may tell a different tale, but it looks like the vic opened the door—someone she knew or thought she knew. Her killer disabled her—note to ME to put priority on tox screens, check body for any marks from a stunner or pressure syringe—or forced her back here. Places like this have excellent soundproofing, so she could have shouted for help, screamed, and it's not likely anyone heard. Windows are privacy screened.”

“No sign on her wrists, her ankles that the killer used restraints.”

Eve approached the body now, examined the head, lifted it up, to check the back of the skull. “No injuries that indicate blunt force trauma.”

She reached into her own field kit for microgoggles, took a closer look. “Abrasion, small contusion. Fell back, hit her head maybe. Disabled, drugged or stunned, either when she opened the door, or if she knew the killer, after he was inside. Back here, carrying her or forcing her. The bedding's not even mussed, the pillows are still stacked up behind her.”

Lifting one of the hands, she examined the fingers, the nails, under the nails. “Clean, no trace here nothing to indicate she got a piece of her killer. You're going to struggle, if you can, when somebody garrotes you, so she couldn't struggle.”

With the microgoggles still in place, Eve leaned over the crystal dish to examine the severed tongue. “It looks pretty clean—not jagged, not sawed. Probably a thin, sharp blade. Maybe a scalpel. Can't talk trash without your tongue,” she said half to herself. “Can't defend criminals if you can't talk. This was a little something extra, a symbol, a . . . token.”

“For you.”

Eve studied the message, coated a layer of ice over that sick thought. “Like I said, it reads that way. We butted heads over Jess Barrow a couple years back, and just before that when her partner was killed. She was a hard-ass, but she was mostly doing her job. Doing it as she saw it.”

Turning from the body now, Eve walked over into a large and perfectly appointed dressing room. “She's got an outfit set out here. Black dress, fancy shoes, underwear, and jewelry to go with it that looks like the real deal. Nothing disturbed. She'd gotten out the wardrobe for her dinner meeting.”

She moved from there into an elaborate master bath, all white and silver. More purple flowers—must have been a favorite—in a square vase of clear glass on the long white counter.

“Towels on a warming rack, a robe on the hook by the shower, a glass of wine and some sort of face gunk set out on the counter.”

“It's a mask.”

“I don't see a mask.”

“A facial mask,” Peabody elaborated, patting her own cheeks. “And that's a really high-end brand

Since there's nothing else set out, it looks like maybe she'd been about to give herself a facial, have some wine while it set, then take a shower, but she went to answer the door."

"Okay, good. She's prepping for the meeting—we'll check her home office—going to get clean and shiny, but somebody comes to the door."

Eve walked out as she continued. "Nothing disturbed out here. Screen on in the bedroom—a little company or entertainment while she gets ready for dinner. She's back there, in the bath or the dressing room when she gets the buzz."

"Security on the main door," Peabody pointed out. "Buzzed the killer in?"

"The security feed should tell us. However he got inside the building, she answers the door."

She imagined it, Bastwick in her swanky at-home wear, going to the door. Look through the security peep first, check the monitor?

Why have good security if you didn't use it? Used it, Eve concluded, felt no threat. Opened the door.

"He takes her down," she continued. "Drags or carries her."

"Or she took him back?" Peabody suggested. "A lover maybe?"

"She's got a meeting. She doesn't have time for sex. Not wearing sex clothes, no face enhancements. Could've forced her back, but it doesn't feel like it. Nothing disturbed. Nothing out of place."

Eve paused there, went back in, studied Bastwick's feet, still cased in silvery slippers. "No scuffs on the heels. She wasn't dragged."

"Carried her, then." Peabody, lips pursed in her square face, gauged the distance from living area to bedroom. "If he did take her down in here, it's a good distance to cart her. Why?"

"Yeah, why? No overt signs of sexual assault. Maybe he re-dressed her after, but . . . Morris will tell us. Killer gets her onto the bed. No sign she was gagged, but the ME will check that, too. He kills her while she's still out or stunned. Quick, cuts out her tongue to prove a point, writes the message so I'll know what a favor he did for me, then gets out.

"Let's talk to the admin, then review the discs. I want to go over this place before we call in the sweepers."

. . .

Cecil Haversham looked like his name. Formal with a side of dapper. He wore his hair white, short, and Caesarean, which suited the natty, perfectly trimmed goatee. The center leg pleats of his stone-gray three-piece suit looked sharp enough to draw blood.

Distress emanated from him in apologetic waves as he sat on a curved-back chair at the side of the lipstick-red dining table with his hands neatly folded.

Eve nodded to the uniform to dismiss her, then rounded to the head of the table with Peabody taking the chair opposite their witness.

"Mr. Haversham, I'm Lieutenant Dallas, and this is Detective Peabody. I understand this is a difficult time for you."

"It's very disturbing." His voice carried the faintest whiff of British upper class, though Eve's quick run on him gave his birthplace as Toledo, Ohio.

"How long have you worked for Ms. Bastwick?"

"Nearly two years as her administrative assistant. Prior I served as Mr. Vance Collier's—of Swarthmore, Colbreck, Collier and Ives—admin."

"And how did you come into her employ?"

"She offered me the position, at a considerable increase in salary and benefits. And I felt moving

into criminal law from corporate and tax law would be . . . more stimulating.”

“As her admin, you’d be privy to her case files, her clients, and her social engagements.”—

“Yes, of course. Ms. Bastwick is . . . was a very busy woman, professionally and personally. Part of my duties is to arrange her schedule, keep her calendar, make certain her time was well managed.”

“Do you know of anyone who’d wish Ms. Bastwick harm?”

“As a criminal defense attorney, she made enemies, of course. Prosecuting attorneys, clients who felt she hadn’t performed adequately—which would be nonsense, of course—and those individuals represented by the prosecution. Even some police.”

He gave Eve a steady if slightly distressed look. “It would be the nature of her work, you see.”

“Yeah. Does anyone stand out?”

“I’ve been asking myself that as I sat here, digesting it all. There have been threats, of course. We keep a file, which I’d be happy to have copied for you if the firm clears it. But nothing stands out in this way. In this tragic way. Ms. Bastwick always said that if nobody threatened her or called her . . . unattractive names, she wasn’t doing her job. I must say, Lieutenant, Detective, you must often find yourself in that same position. The work you do creates enemies, particularly, one would think, if you do it well.”

“Can’t argue there.” Eve sat back. “Take me through it. When did you become concerned about Ms. Bastwick, and what did you do?”

“I became concerned, very concerned, this morning. I arrive at the offices at eight-fifteen, routinely. This provides me time to check any messages, the daily schedule, prepare any necessary notes or documents for the morning appointments. Unless Ms. Bastwick is in court or has an early outside appointment, she arrives between eight-thirty and eight-forty. When I arrived this morning, there was a message from Misterns Chance Warren and Zane Quirk. Ms. Bastwick had a dinner meeting with them last night, eight o’clock at Monique’s on Park. The message came in at nine-oh-three last evening. The clients were somewhat irritated that Ms. Bastwick hadn’t arrived.”

“They contacted the office—after hours?”

“Yes, exactly. In the message, Mr. Warren stated that they’d tried to reach Ms. Bastwick on her pocket ’link—the business number she’d given them as she does all clients. Failing to reach her, they tried the office, left a message.”

He paused, cleared his throat. “As this is not at all characteristic, I was concerned enough to try to contact Ms. Bastwick via ’link, but was only able to leave a voice mail, which I did on both of her numbers. I then contacted Mr. Warren, and discovered Ms. Bastwick had never arrived at the restaurant, and he and Mr. Quirk had dinner, remained there until after ten.”

When he paused, cleared his throat again, Peabody interrupted. “Can I get you some water, Mr. Haversham?”

“Oh, I don’t want to be any trouble.”

“It’s no trouble. We appreciate your cooperation,” she said as she rose.

“Very kind.” He brushed his finger over the knot of his tie. “I had expected Ms. Bastwick’s arrival at eight-twenty this morning as, per her request, I had scheduled an early meeting at the offices. She didn’t arrive, and I rescheduled with the client, again tried her ’link. I confess, Lieutenant— Oh, thank you, Detective,” he said when Peabody brought him a tall glass of water. He sipped delicately, let out a long breath.

“As I was saying, I confess I was deeply concerned at this point. I worried Ms. Bastwick had taken ill or met with an accident. I made the decision to come here, in case she was ill and unable to reach the ’link. As I explained to the officer, I have her codes as I tend to her plants and other business whenever she’s out of town. When she didn’t answer the buzzer, I took it upon myself to use the code and enter the apartment. I understand that might seem forward, an invasion of privacy, but I was

genuinely worried.”

“It seems sensible to me.”

“Thank you.” He took another delicate sip. “I called out for her, and as I heard voices—I realized after a moment it was the entertainment screen in the bedroom—I called out again. Very concerned now as she didn’t respond, I went directly to her bedroom. I called out once again, in case she was indisposed, then I went to the door.”

“Was it open or closed?”

“Oh, open. I saw her immediately. I saw . . . I started in, somehow thinking I could help. Then I stopped myself, just before I reached the foot of the bed, as it was all too clear I could be of no help to her. I was very shaken. I . . . I might have shouted, I’m not sure. I got out my ’link. My hands trembled so I nearly dropped it. I contacted nine-one-one. The operator, who was very calming and kind, I’d like to add, instructed me not to touch anything, and to wait for the police. I did touch the front door upon entering, and again when I admitted the officers. And I may have touched the doorjamb of the bedroom. I can’t quite remember.”

“It’s okay.”

“I saw what was written on the wall. I couldn’t not see it. But I don’t understand it.”

“In the file of threats you have, do you remember any that involved me? Anyone threatening her connection with the Jess Barrow matter?”

“I don’t. I came on after the Barrow case, though I’m familiar with it.”

“As a matter of procedure, can you tell us where you were last night, between five and eight p.m.?”

“Oh my.” Now he took a deeper drink of water. “Well, yes, of course. I left the office at five-oh-five. My wife had plans to have dinner with her sister as it was my turn to host my chess club. Marion isn’t particularly interested in chess. I arrived home about five-twenty, and began preparations for dinner. Marion left about five-forty-five, to meet her sister for drinks, and the first of the club arrived at six, precisely. We had a light meal, and played until . . . I believe it was about nine-thirty. The last of our club would have left just before ten, shortly after Marion returned home. There are eight of us who can provide you with their names.”

“We’d appreciate that. It’s routine.”

“I understand. Ms. Bastwick was an exacting employer. I prefer that as I do my best when I have tasks and goals, and challenges. I believe we suited each other very well. I also understand some found her difficult. I did not.”

For the first time he looked away, his eyes moist. Eve said nothing as he visibly struggled to compose himself again.

“I’m sorry. I’m very distressed.”

“Take your time.”

“Yes, thank you. I didn’t find Ms. Bastwick difficult. Even if I had I would say what I say to you now. Anything I can do to assist you in finding who took her life, you have only to ask.”

“You’ve been really helpful,” Peabody told him. “Maybe you could give us a sense of how Ms. Bastwick got along with her partners, her colleagues, the people at your firm.”

“Oh, well, there would be some friction now and then, as you’d expect. A great deal of competition. But I will say she was valued, and respected. I . . . my own assistant has tried to contact me several times. The officer asked I not answer my ’link, so I’ve switched it off. But I should go back to the offices when it’s permitted. There are so many things that need to be done, need to be seen to.”

“Just one more thing,” Eve said. “Was she working on anything big right now, anything hot?”

“I suppose Misters Warren and Quirk would qualify. They are accused of embezzlement and fraud from their own financial consulting firm. The matter will go to the courts next week. Ms. Bastwick

was very confident she would get a not-guilty verdict on all charges. She was a fierce litigator, as you know.”

“Yeah. Is there anyone we can contact for you, Mr. Haversham?”

“For me?” He looked blank for a moment. “No, no, but thank you. I’ll go back to the office, do what needs to be done.”

“We’d appreciate copies of those threats.”

“Yes, I’ll speak to Mr. Stern right away.”

“We can arrange for one of the officers to drive you back to the office,” Peabody offered.

“So kind. But it’s not far, and I believe I’d like to walk. I believe it would help if I could walk and sort through my thoughts.”

He rose as Eve did. “Her family. I just thought. She has parents and a sister. Her parents live in Palm Beach, and her sister . . .” He paused a moment, rubbed at his temple. “She lives with her family in East Washington. Should I contact them?”

“We’ll take care of it,” Eve told him. “If you think of anything else, let us know.”

“I will, of course. I want to ask, for my own peace of mind. Would it have been quick?”

“I think it would have.”

“I hope she didn’t suffer.”

While Peabody guided him out, Eve returned to the dressing room.

“He was sweet under the stuffy,” Peabody commented when she came in. “And I think he really liked her.”

“He’d be one,” Eve said. “She was a hard-ass, cold-blooded and snotty with it. I don’t think she’ll have a long list of actual friends, but there’ll be plenty of acquaintances, clients, associates. There’s a safe here, as I figured. It doesn’t look like it’s been tampered with, but we’ll want EDD in here to get it open, check it out. We’ll want to talk to her insurance people, cross-check valuables. Just cover the bets, Peabody, on the very slim chance the message is a herring.”

“A red herring?”

“Why are they red, and what the hell does that expression really mean anyway? It’s annoying.”

Eve took a moment, pressed her fingers to her eyes.

YOUR TRUE AND LOYAL FRIEND.

The last words of the message played around and around in her head. She had to push them out. For now.

“Okay, this is going to be a freaking shitstorm. We need to do the family notifications right away as this is going to leak fast. We need to get the PA to cover us on getting copies of whatever we can get. The threats, her client list, case files. Her firm’s going to make the usual noises, and maybe louder than usual. The media’s going to start salivating as soon as this message crap gets out, and it will.”

“Who’d kill for you?” Peabody waited until Eve lowered her hands. “I mean who’d kill because somebody was rude to you, or, well, snotty?”

“Nobody leaps to mind. I tend to avoid relationships with the homicidal.”

“I don’t mean a specific name, Dallas. A type, a category even. Like someone you helped, someone you maybe saved from harm. Or someone close to someone you helped or saved. That’s a possibility. Someone who’s followed your career is another. A wannabe. You get a lot of media, Dallas, whether you like it or not. And it’s ‘or not,’ I get that. But you get a lot of media. You’ve closed a lot of big cases.”

“We’ve closed.”

“Yeah, but I’m not married to the kick-your-ass-sideways gorgeous Irish guy with more money

than God. Who gets plenty of media, too. Add in all the buzz from the Ilove case, Nadine's book on the major success of the vid."

"Fuck." Frustrated, a little headachy, Eve shoved her fingers through her hair. "That's going to hound me forever. But you've got some clear thinking here, and it's the sort of direction we need to pursue. Someone who feels like they owe me, and twist. A wannabe who figures they'll *defend* me by doing what I can't. Kill off enemies, or someone perceived to be. Because screw it, Peabody, I haven't given Bastwick a thought since Barrow lost his appeal, more than a year ago."

She stepped back into the bedroom, read the message again. "She didn't show me respect," Eve murmured. "Let's hope that's not the thrust of the motive, because there's a list that could circle the damn planet of people who haven't shown me respect. I'm a goddamn cop. *Her life was a lie; her death our truth.* Our? Does he have a partner? Is he talking about me—him and me?"

"It follows a theme, doesn't it? It's for you, and for justice. Bastwick, criminal defense attorney, you the cop. Plus, somebody knows grammar and so on. The semicolon. How many killers do we know who'd use a semicolon?"

"Huh. That's a point. Okay, we're going to have to look at the cop, justice, disrespect deal, at the big, wide picture, but right now, let's focus in on the vic, and why her, specifically. High-profile, rich, attractive, with plenty of enemies."

"Sounds like you," Peabody said quietly. The concern that pressed on her chest showed in her dark eyes. "Maybe that's another connection."

"I'm not rich. Roarke's rich, and I don't deck myself out like she did every day."

"You look good."

"Gee, thanks, Peabody."

"Look, you're tall, skinny, got the cheekbones and the dent in the chin going. You look good, and you look good on camera. Tough, and okay, you come off as a cop even if you're decked out for one of Roarke's deals. Maybe it's a guy with some lust going, and this is his way of, you know, wooing you."

"Screw it again." Because that idea made her a little bit sick. "Let's review the discs instead of speculating. And let's go ahead and call in the sweepers and the morgue." Eve glanced back at the body. "She needs to be taken care of."

"The killer?" Peabody jutted a chin toward the note before she picked up her coat. "He doesn't get that. Doesn't get that at all."

Eve inserted the security disc, exterior, into her PPC and, weighing the odds, zipped through to an hour before TOD.

“Killer could live in the building, or could have come in at any time, but we’ll go with most likely for this pass.”

She watched people go in, go out. Hauling shopping bags, she noted. Did people *never* stop shopping? What could they possibly do with all the stuff? It baffled her.

“Cutting it close now,” Peabody commented, “unless my gauges are off, we’re down to about fifteen minutes before TOD. Maybe it is somebody who lives in the building or—”

“Here. Here we go.”

With Peabody, Eve watched a delivery person—gender undetermined—step up to the main door and the security panel.

“Pause run. Look he—or maybe she—holds the big box up on the shoulder, blocking the face from the cameras. Big brown coat, brown pants, laced boots, brown gloves, dark ski cap pulled over the hair, scarf wrapped around the neck and lower face. You don’t even get a solid confirmation of race.”

“The way he’s angled, you can’t really see which buzzer he’s pushing. EDD may be able to enhance, but it has to be the vic’s. He looks like he’s solidly built, but—”

“Big bulky coat. Can’t get build. We can get approximate height. Goes right in. We switch to interior. Straight to the elevator,” Eve said a moment later. “Knows where the cameras are. The fucker’s been here before, or got hands on the security schematics. Keeps the box angled just right. Into the elevator . . . What have we got, what have we got? Hands. They don’t look like big hands. Could be a man, could be a woman. We’ve got hands, feet, height. We can do an analysis there. Goddamn it, walks right out, re-angles the box, and straight to the vic’s door.”

“She opened it for him—or her—just like you said. And . . . he’s reaching in his pocket. Dallas—”

“Yeah, I see. Moves quick. She opens the door. ‘Ms. Bastwick, Leanoire Bastwick, got a delivery for you. It’s pretty heavy, miss, let me set it inside for you.’ Yeah, she opens the door a little more, shifts back—out of camera range. And he moves in, pulling something. Goddamn it again, just out of range. And kicks the door closed behind him. Smooth, fast. Fuck.”

“It’s like you saw it before you saw it,” Peabody said.

“Yeah, that doesn’t help her much.” Eve shook it off, zipped through until she saw the door open again. “In and out in what, twenty-seven minutes. Control, that’s control, and that’s purpose. Still carrying the box, still blocking the face.

“But . . . Do you see it?”

“I don’t know. What should I see?”

“A jaunty spring to the step. Somebody’s happy, somebody’s feeling really, really good, good enough to strut it out. But still careful, careful enough to block the camera, and all the way out and gone. Notify Transit, get them the image, for what it’s worth. Let’s see if the killer took the subway. And we’ll check cabs. Nobody that careful caught one close to the building, but we’ll give it a shot.”

They worked the scene, going through Bastwick’s home office, tagging the electronics for the Electronic Detectives Division, scouring the victim’s ’links for any communications that might give them a handhold.

Eve spoke briefly with Dawson, the head sweeper.

“EDD’s sending people down for the electronics. The killer used elevator B, coming and going, sweep that down, too. I’ve had it shut down till it’s processed.”

“We’re on it.” Dawson studied her with his quick, dark eyes from under his white sweeper’s hood. “We’ll give it a push, Dallas. Nobody likes a gift tag with their name on it on a DB.”

He studied the message as she did. “Hell of a way to ring out the old,” he said.

Eve left the bedroom, hooked back up with Peabody. They left the building together.

“First canvass got nothing,” Peabody told her. “Nobody saw the delivery guy—person. Transit’s still going over their security runs, but so far, nothing that matches. Of course, he could’ve ditched the box.”

“I don’t think so, not when he may need it again.”

“Again.” Peabody eased into the passenger seat of Eve’s car. “You think he’s going to target another?”

“Odds are. Jaunty walk,” she reminded her partner, and she pulled out from the curb. “This was too much fun not to do again. But we run it straight. Look at boyfriends, girlfriends, exes, coworkers, clients.”

“Jess Barrow. He’s in a cage, but if anybody would want to get back at you and her, all at once, he qualifies. You busted him, she didn’t get him off.”

“She got him less time in a cage than he earned. But yeah, he bears a look. Then there’s the firm. Fitzhugh, now Bastwick—that’s two partners murdered in about two years. We go over her threat file with fucking microgoggles.”

“Um. How about yours?”

Eve drummed her fingers on the wheel as she drove toward Cop Central. “I wasn’t threatened. There, we’d look the other way. Into—what is it?—fan mail. Except I don’t keep any of that crap if it gets through to me.”

“I do. I got some really nice messages after the Ilove vid came out.” Thinking of it had Peabody’s cheek pinkening with pleasure. “My favorite’s from a twelve-year-old girl who said how she’d wanted to be a vid star, but now she wanted to be a cop like me. It was really sweet. You probably got a ton.”

“I don’t know.” Uncomfortable with all of it, Eve shifted. “If any came through Central, I dumped it on Kyung. He’s media liaison, right? If it came through the Hollywood people, I told them to deal with it. I’m a cop, for Christ’s sake.”

Peabody waited two full beats. “Well, they probably have all of it on file.”

Eve took a hand off the wheel to drag it violently through her hair. “Yeah, yeah, they probably do and you’re right, it all needs to be read over and analyzed. Give me a second.”

She needed to settle down, simmer down. Hadn’t she just said she was a cop? Then she needed to start thinking like a cop.

Push the emotion, the sick dread, the damn headache to the side, and do what came next.

“We’ll get Mira to put some shrink type on it, coordinate between Hollywood and Kyung. Kyung’s no asshole, and he’ll streamline it, add the shrink type, a behavioral science type to analyze. If the message on the wall wasn’t a smoke screen—that’s low probability, but it’s not without merit—it’s likely the killer has communicated or tried to communicate with me in some way at some time. Feel this connection. So we’ll cover that area with people who know what to look for.”

“Okay. I’ll contact Kyung and dump it on him. He’s media liaison, right?” She tossed Eve’s words back at her. “He’ll liaise. If there are any red flags, we pick them up and follow them up.”

“Right again. Make that happen, Peabody,” Eve said as she drove into Central’s garage. “We keep a lid on it as long as we can, but we cover all the areas. I’m going straight up to Whitney,” she added when she’d parked. “I need to give the commander a full report, and asap. Get the ball rolling on the communications. Write up your report, send the commander a copy, send Mira a copy.”

“You should talk to her, too,” Peabody added, referring to the department’s top shrink and profiler.

“I know it. I will. Whitney first. He’s going to consider the pros and cons of leaving us—me—on this. I need to weigh the scale heavy on the pros.”

“I hadn’t thought about that. I should’ve thought of that. Damn it.” Peabody stepped onto the elevator with Eve.

“You handle the liaison shit. I’ll handle this. Work fast,” Eve ordered. “I want to get to the law

offices and the morgue.”

~~Eve stayed on after Peabody escaped the elevator. Cops and civilian personnel crammed in, pried out, squeezed on. Normally, she'd have pushed her way off, taken one of the glides. But as annoying as they were, Central's elevators were faster.~~

When she finally muscled her way off, she reminded herself to be clear, thorough, and dispassionate.

She reached Whitney's outer office, and his admin.

“I need to see him.”

The woman's eyebrows arched in surprise. “Lieutenant. You're not on his schedule. I—”

“It's important I speak with Commander Whitney as soon as possible.”

With a nod, and no questions, the admin tapped her earpiece, spoke in quiet tones.

“Sir, Lieutenant Dallas is here, and asks to speak with you. Yes, sir, now. Of course.” She tapped the earpiece again. “Go right in, Lieutenant.”

“Thanks.” Eve started toward the big double doors, paused. “Do you know Dr. Mira's admin?”

“I do.” The woman smiled. “Quite well, as it happens.”

“She could take lessons,” Eve muttered, and opened Whitney's door.

He sat behind his massive desk, a big, broad-shouldered man currently speaking on his desk 'link. He gestured Eve in, gave her the sign to wait.

She closed the door behind her, used the few moments it took him to end the call taking stock, making sure she would and could be dispassionate.

He ended the call, aimed a look from his dark eyes. He rode a desk, she thought, but his eyes were as canny as the street cop he'd once been.

“Leanore Bastwick.”

“Yes, sir.”

Though he gestured to a chair, Eve walked forward, stayed on her feet. “I wanted to apprise you of the situation, the status, in person.”

“So I gather.”

He had a wide, dark face topped by a short cap of hair where the salt was rapidly overtaking the pepper. But she thought he looked rested, even relaxed, so assumed his holiday had been a good one.

She was about to put a stop to that.

“You've been informed of her murder?” Eve began.

“As she was a prominent criminal defense attorney, one this department has butted heads with regularly—and one who courted the media—I was informed of the nine-one-one, and your status as primary. What do I need to know now?”

“Bastwick's body was discovered by her administrative assistant, Cecil Haversham, at approximately nine hundred hours, when he, concerned with her missing scheduled meetings, let himself into her apartment. Haversham had her codes, as part of his duties. We will verify his alibi for TOD, but he is not a suspect at this time. The victim was strangled, most likely with a garrote, no overt signs of struggle or sexual assault. TOD was eighteen-thirty-three yesterday. Security cams show an individual entering her building in the guise of a delivery person, using said delivery to block his or her face from the cameras.”

“Which indicates knowledge of said cameras, and the building.”

“Yes, sir. She opened the door to said individual. Cams got him reaching into his right pocket as she stepped back to admit him. He left, with the delivery, about twenty-five minutes after entering the vic's apartment.”

“Quick work.”

“In and out of the building in under thirty, yes, sir.”

He leaned back. “Pro?”

~~“Clean as one, for the most part. But that isn’t highest probability at this time. The sweepers are currently processing the scene, and the body has been transported to the morgue. I requested Chief Morris.”~~

“Naturally.” Whitney spread his big hands. “And while there will be some media attention given the victim’s predilection for appealing to same on behalf of her clients, there’s nothing in your report that warrants this break of habit. You don’t come to me as a rule, Dallas, unless summoned. What do you need to know now?”

“May I use your screen, Commander?”

He gestured to it.

It took Eve a moment—Christ, she hated electronics more than half the time—but she managed to find the disc insert, cue it up, turn it on.

The screen filled with the message written on the wall above the body.

Whitney rose from his chair, walked slowly around his desk, his eyes on the screen.

“When did you last see or speak with the victim?”

“At Jess Barrow’s failed appeal. About a year back. I haven’t had any cases since then that involved her. We got in each other’s faces at that time—some. More during the investigation of Barrow and the investigation of her partner’s—Fitzhugh’s—murder. Cop and defense attorney, nothing more, nothing less. I didn’t like her—as a person or as a lawyer—but I don’t like a lot of people.”

“Did you ever express the wish that she was dead?”

“Commander—”

“However casually, Lieutenant.” His gaze, leveled on hers, clearly said: No bullshit. “In the heat of the moment, to anyone?”

“No, sir, I did not. I may have—probably did—call her any number of uncomplimentary names. The fact is, sir, we just didn’t come up against each other that much. If it comes to it, I had more of a run-in with Fitzhugh prior to his death, as we’d just crossed in court, than I’ve had with Bastwick. We’ve never had personal dealings, have never socialized, have never spoken outside the boundaries of an investigation or court. From the ease with which the killer accessed her apartment, I’d say the killer knew Bastwick much better than I do. That will change.”

“This will get out.” Whitney nodded to the screen.

“Yes, sir, it will. Even if we could keep it shut down, the killer won’t. What’s the point of going to all the trouble to write that, then not get any attention, or gratitude?”

Whitney went back, sat again. “You and I both know it would be considerably less . . . sticky, if I assigned another primary to this investigation.”

“Maybe less sticky, Commander, but I’m asking you not to do that. If the killer meant what was written, this murder was a favor to me, a punishment for disrespect. Taking me off as primary could, and I think would, be seen as more disrespect. This individual thinks he knows me, and he doesn’t. That gives me an advantage.”

Dispassionate, Eve reminded herself.

“Peabody is coordinating all correspondence sent to me through Central, and considering the exposure from the Icove investigation, book, and vid, through the Hollywood people. We’re going to request Dr. Mira assign a behaviorist to analyze said correspondence if she doesn’t have time to analyze it all herself. It’s likely the killer has attempted to contact me prior to this, most likely more than once.

“As I already have some working knowledge of the victim’s firm due to the previous homicide, it gives me a leg up there.”

Lay it out, she told herself. Quick and logical.

~~“Two homicides in one law firm defies considerable odds, and the killer’s knowledge of the victim’s building, exactly where the cameras were, exactly where her apartment was situated—and he knew she was home, home and alone, or he wouldn’t have struck at that time—indicates inside knowledge or considerable research.”~~

“It’s your name on the wall, Dallas.”

“Yes, sir, it is. He wants my attention, Commander, or he wouldn’t have left anything, much less written note. I want to give it to him. By doing so, it’s possible he may try to contact me again.

“It’s impossible to say this isn’t personal on some level—my name’s on the wall. But I hope you can take my word that won’t get in my way.”

Steepling his hands, Whitney tapped his fingers together, studied Eve over them. “If I were to reassign this, which cop in your division would you recommend as primary?”

It was a kick in the gut, but she stood, answered with truth. “There’s no cop in my division I wouldn’t recommend. Every one of them would pursue this investigation thoroughly, diligently, and work until they’d closed the case.”

“That’s the right answer. You’re going to keep that in mind, as am I. I’ll speak with Chief Tibble. You will speak with Kyung on exactly how to handle the media shitstorm when it hits, because it will. I expect you to keep your word, Lieutenant. If it gets in your way, you say it, and you step back.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Get to work.”

“Thank you, Commander.”

She struggled not to feel too much relief as she left the office.

Dispassionate, she told herself again. Just another case.

But that was bullshit because . . . it was always bullshit. It was never just another case.

She headed straight down to Homicide, ignoring the low-grade headache in the back of her skull. When she stepped into her division she took just a moment, evaluated.

She had spoken complete truth.

Any one of them. Every one of them, from Jenkinson slurping bad coffee while scowling at his desk screen, to Baxter, his glossy, expensive shoes propped on his desk as he talked on his ’link. Carmichael and Santiago, heads together at her desk, arguing in undertones.

They still had the holiday decorations up, the ridiculous and scrawny tree, the odd assembly of symbolism from Kwanzaa corn to the dented menorah to the creepily amusing zombie Santa.

And the sign that hung now—and as far as she was concerned would always hang—over the break room door.

NO MATTER YOUR RACE, CREED, SEXUAL ORIENTATION OR POLITICAL AFFILIATION, WE PROTECT AND SERVE. BECAUSE YOU COULD GET DEAD.

That’s just the way it was, she thought as Reineke came out of the break room with more bad coffee.

She went back to her office, where she had really good coffee. She considered, as she never had, that she could install Roarke’s real and excellent blend in the break room. But then she rejected the notion as temporarily sentimental.

You just didn’t go around breaking tradition of bad cop break-room coffee because you felt good about having good cops under your command.

Besides, they’d lose the fun of sneaking in and stealing it from her AutoChef. Who was she to spoil their good time?

So she took off her coat, programmed her really good coffee, and sat to start her murder book and board.

Her vic deserved the routine, the procedure—and she'd work better when that routine and procedure were in place.

Once they were, she and Peabody would start the interviews at the law offices, connect with Morris at the morgue. She'd personally hound the sweepers and the lab.

And she'd carve out enough time, sometime, to follow orders and connect with Kyung.

Nadine, she thought, rubbing absently at the back of her neck. Nadine Furst—ace on-air reporter, and the best-selling writer of *The Icove Agenda*. She'd need to talk to Nadine.

If someone did their research—and Eve was confident the killer had—they'd know she and Nadine were personal friends. They might see Nadine as a conduit—the public figure, the on-air personality, and fierce reporter as an avenue to the cop.

In any case, when the lid tipped a fraction loose on the details at the crime scene, Nadine Furst would scent out the story like a cat scented a mouse.

Smarter to bring her in first.

Even as she considered the best approach, Eve heard the click of heels on their way to her office. Thinking Nadine, she started to get up, cover her murder board.

Mira walked in.

It wasn't usual for Mira to come to her, or to walk into Eve's office and close the door behind her. "Sit," Mira ordered.

More surprised than annoyed, Eve gestured to her desk chair. "Take this one."

"Sit," Mira snapped, and deliberately took Eve's miserably uncomfortable visitor's chair. "You're a smart woman," Mira began, "an exceptional cop. As both, you know you should pass this investigation on."

"I'm a smart woman," Eve agreed, "and an exceptional cop. As both, I'll be damned if I'll pass it on because someone's using me as an excuse to kill."

"That makes it personal."

Eve sat, breathed. "They're all personal," she tossed back, and had the dignified Mira scowling. "Murder is as personal as it gets. A good cop knows how to be objective about the personal."

"Eve." Mira stopped, patted a hand in the air to indicate she was taking a moment.

Eve gave it to her.

Mira wore a deep brick-red rather than her more customary soft colors, but the suit was—as always—perfection. Her sable hair—color and texture—swung in a bob, her newest do, around her lovely face, made her quiet blue eyes seem just a little deeper.

Or maybe that was just annoyance, Eve considered.

Now, as if drawing herself in, Mira sat back—wincing as the chair likely pinched her ass—then crossed excellent legs.

"It's personal for the killer—to you. This person sees himself—we'll use the male pronoun for simplicity—as your friend, more your champion. He has fantasized a relationship with you, which has only become deeper to him now that he's killed for you. He gave you a gift. At some point he'll expect your appreciation."

"He'll be disappointed."

"And when disappointed, he will strike out."

"If I passed it on, if I said—essentially—this one's not worth my time and effort? What then? Wouldn't he have to kill again, do better, find someone I'd feel more worth my time and effort?"

Mira tapped the toe of her brick-red heel. "An exceptional cop," she muttered. "Yes, that's possible. What is clear is you are his focus."

“I don’t know that’s clear—I say yeah, most likely. But it’s also possible this was really about Bastwick. I need to do my job, determine that or disprove that. It seems to me the question we should be asking— profiler-wise—is, Why am I the focus? Where did this fantasy friendship come from? How do I exploit it to stop him? Help me do that.”

On a long sigh, Mira glanced toward the AutoChef.

“You want some of that tea you like? I think I have some.”

“I would, actually. I’m upset. You matter.”

Eve rose, programmed the tea. “You can’t let this be personal.”

“It’s always personal,” Mira countered, then smiled when Eve glanced back. “A good psychiatrist like a good cop, knows how to be objective about the personal. This person, Eve, has idealized you, and that’s very dangerous.”

“Why?” Eve handed Mira the tea. “Not why it’s dangerous, I get that. Why has he idealized me?”

“You’re a strong woman in a dangerous career. One who has risen in that career.”

“Plenty of female cops,” Eve pointed out. “Plenty of them with rank.”

“Added to that, many of your cases garner considerable media attention. You’re married to an important, highly successful man of some mystery who also garners considerable media attention.”

She sipped some tea while Eve brooded over that one.

“You were spotlighted in a successful book, portrayed in a successful and critically acclaimed vid,” Mira continued. “You risk your life to protect and serve, when you’re in the position where you could simply travel, live a rich and privileged life. Instead of living that privileged life, you work long, sometimes impossible hours, taking those risks to do a job, to pursue justice.”

“Following that, why kill Bastwick? Anybody? I’m doing the job.”

“But not serving justice as this person sees it,” Mira pointed out. “How can you? You are the ideal but also hampered by the rules of your job. So this person will seek justice for you.”

“But Bastwick? She didn’t matter.”

“Not to you, not particularly, but to this person she represented all her defendants, all you work against. All who have shown you disrespect, who haven’t properly paid you homage.”

“Well, Christ.” She looked back at her board, at Leanore Bastwick. Alive and dead. “But Bastwick and I hardly had any dealings with each other. And the ones we did, the bulk of them, were a couple years ago.”

“This may have been planned for some time, considered, studied. We may find Bastwick said something, publicly, or something offhand that was overheard, about you that triggered this person’s disgust more recently. Not rage, not yet.”

Eve looked toward the murder board again. “But that could come. Bastwick was also a prominent woman in her field. This might be a reason for the choice. This was a well-planned killing, and well-controlled. Goal-oriented. And one that was committed in hopes, I believe, of some acknowledgment. If it had been a selfless act—as the message attempts to convey—there would have been no message. She looked back at Mira for confirmation. “Right? You do somebody a favor and mean it, you don’t want the glory from it.”

“No, not if it’s genuine. This was done looking for a return. From you.”

“The killer wants my attention, I get that. If I don’t give it, he’ll escalate. If I do . . . he’s going to kill again anyway. He liked it. Plus, if someone’s the object of your . . . affection, for lack of better, don’t you want to keep giving?”

“Yes, but you always want appreciation, acknowledgment, even reciprocation. Eve, you want some sort of return.”

“Either way I handle this—unless we’re all wrong and it was really about Bastwick—he’s not finished. If I stay on it, there’s a better chance I can stop him, I might be able to calculate who might

be next.”

“Eventually you’ll be next. Eventually you’ll disappoint him, and he’ll feel betrayed by you. Idols always fall, Eve.”

“I’d be next at some point anyway.”

Mira said nothing, just sat for a moment, sipping at her tea. “If this had been a taunt—a catch-me-if-you-can sort of communication, I’d be less concerned. But this isn’t a contest. This was a kind of offering.”

She breathed in, set the cup aside. “I’ll analyze the correspondence myself. We’ll look for a repeater. Someone who’s written or tried to contact you in some way multiple times. Someone who sees, and it will show, a relationship with you. This may have also escalated through the correspondence.

“I haven’t read Peabody’s report as concisely as I must,” Mira admitted. “But what I did read indicates the killer was very controlled, very careful, had previous knowledge of the victim’s security and habits. So he studied her, stalked her, or is in some way privy to her habits. He’s also studied you and while he wants your attention, he does not wish to be caught or stopped. ‘Your true and loyal friend,’” Mira said. “Indicates he believes he is, and that he is the only one capable or willing to stand up for you. Roarke should be careful.”

“Roarke?”

“Your husband didn’t punish this woman who showed you disrespect. How can he be worthy of you?”

“If you think he’d target Roarke—”

“Not yet,” Mira interrupted, “but eventually he may. He may be compelled to eliminate those close to you in order to feel closer to you himself. For now, it’s an enemies list—if he has one. But I promise you, he knows those you love, your friends. Your partner.”

Eve rose again. “Peabody? My men? Mavis—God, the baby?” She hadn’t gone there, hadn’t considered. And now that she did . . . “I’ll pass the investigation on. I’ll step back. Step out.”

“No.” Mira shook her head. “You were right, I was wrong. Stepping back wouldn’t change his motives, and might even escalate his needs. You’ll have to be very careful how you react in any public way, what you say that can and will be reported in the media. He’ll hang on your every word, your every gesture. And his feelings about those words, about those gestures, will be his truth. You’re not just the primary investigator, Eve, not merely connected to the victim in this person’s mind. You’re a target.”

“I need to protect the people around me,” Eve said—and Mira, she thought, was one of them. “So I’d better get to work.”

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