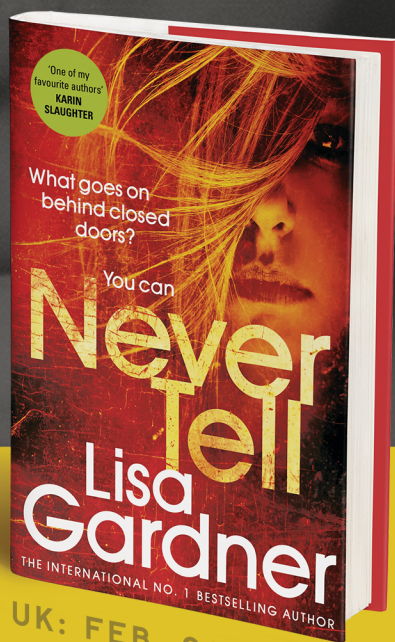




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## CHAPTER 1

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# EVIE

**B**Y THE TIME I PULL my car into the garage, my hands are shaking on the wheel. I tell myself I have no reason to feel so nervous. I tell myself I've done nothing wrong. I still sit there an extra beat, staring straight ahead, as if some magic answer to the mess that is my life will appear in the windshield.

It doesn't.

With a bit of care, I can still slide out of the driver's seat. I'm bigger, but not that much bigger. I fight more with my bulky coat, the strap of my oversized purse, as I ease out from behind the steering wheel. Conrad bought me the purse as a Christmas gift last year. From Coach. Real leather. At least a couple of hundred dollars. At the time, I'd been so excited I'd thrown my arms around him and squealed. He'd laughed, told me he'd seen me eyeing the bag in the store and had just known he had to get it for me.

When I'd hugged him then, he'd hugged me back. When I'd laughed that day, and giddily opened up the huge, gray leather bag to explore all the compartments, he'd laughed with me.

Christmas morning. Nearly one year ago.

Had we hugged since? Laughed since?

The bulge in my belly would argue we'd found some way to connect, and yet, if not for the streams of bright colored lights and gaudy decorations covering my neighborhood, I'm not sure it would feel like the holidays at all. As it is, we're one of the last undecorated houses on the block. A wreath on our door; that's it. Each weekend we promised to get a tree. Each weekend, we didn't.

I take my time hefting my purse over my shoulder. Then I turn and face the door leading from the garage into the house.

Dead man walking, I think. And something crumples inside me. I don't cry. But I'm not sure why.

The door is open. Cracked slightly. As if on the way out, I didn't pull it hard enough shut. Letting out all the heat, my father would say, which causes me a fresh pang of pain.

I push through the interior door, close it firmly behind me. That's it. I'm home. Standing in the mudroom. Another day done. Another night to begin.

Hang up the purse. Shrug out of the coat. Ease off the boots. Bag on the bench. Jacket on the coat rack. Shoes on the mat. I fish my cell phone out of my bag and set it up on the side table to charge. Then, I take a final moment.

Breathe in. Breathe out.

Listening for him.

The kitchen? He could be sitting at the table. Waiting in front of a cold dinner. Or pointedly taking the last bite. Or maybe he's moved into the family room, ensconced in his recliner, feet up, beer in hand, eyes glued to ESPN. Sunday is football. Go Patriots. I've lived in Boston long enough to know that much. But Tuesday night? I never got into sports. He'd watch; I'd read. Back in the days when we spent so much time glued together, it seemed natural to also have some time apart.

I don't hear the clinking of silverware from the kitchen. Nor the low rumble of TV from the family room.

Door open, I remember. And my left hand flattens on the relatively small, but noticeable, curve of my belly.

The hall leads me to the kitchen. A spindly table sits in front of the back window. No sign of dinner. But then I notice a rinsed plate lying neatly in the sink.

Breathe in. Breathe out.

I should have a story, I think. An excuse. A lie. Something. But in the growing silence, my thoughts churn more, my brain spinning wildly.

Dead man walking. Dead woman walking?

I'm going to vomit. I can blame it on the baby. You can blame anything on pregnancy. I'm sick, I'm tired, I'm stupid, I lost track of time. Baby brain, pregnancy hormones. For nine whole months, nothing has to be my fault. And yet . . .

Why did I come home tonight? Except, of course, where else do I have to go? Ever since I first met Conrad ten years ago . . . He noticed me. He saw me. He forgave me.

And I loved him.

Ten whole years, I have loved him.

I leave the kitchen. It's small and, like the rest of the 1950s house, still in desperate need of updating. We purchased the place with hope and aspiration. Sure it sat on a postage stamp yard, and each room was tinier than the last, but it was ours. And being young and handy, we'd fix it up, open it up, then sell it for oodles of money.

Now I walk down a narrow hallway where half the wallpaper hangs down in pieces, and do my best not to notice.

Family room. Den, really. With Conrad's beloved La-Z-Boy, a modest sofa, and of course, an enormous flat-screen TV. The recliner is empty. The TV is off. The room is empty.

Door open, I remember again.



Our garage fits only a single vehicle, and even that is a perk in a Boston neighborhood. Conrad parks his Jeep on the street. Which I check now. Because I'd spotted it pulling into the driveway and, yes, there it is. Black Jeep. Situated at the curb straight outside. A prime spot I can already imagine he was thrilled to get, as even with parking permits there's more demand than supply. Hence his kindness in giving me the garage.

*It's okay, honey. I don't want you walking down the street alone at night. I like knowing that you're safe.*

Dead woman walking. Dead woman walking.

Don't vomit now.

And then . . .

Then . . .

"Door open," I whisper. And I finally notice what I should've noticed from the very beginning.

SMELL. I'D BEEN listening for the sound of my husband. The clatter of silverware in the kitchen. The thump of his recliner banging back in the family room. But there aren't any sounds. No sounds at all.

The house is hushed. Quiet. Still.

As if it were empty.

Smell.

The stairs leading to the second floor are like the rest of the house, narrow, confining, creaky. Conrad tightened the bannister three months ago. When I broke the news. When we both stood in our bedroom and stared at the little stick. My hands had been shaking so hard he'd had to take it from me.

I remember feeling ill then, too. Willing myself not to vomit, though it had been the near-constant queasiness that had led me to take the pregnancy test. A marriage is a mosaic of a thousand mo-

ments, a hundred precious memories. That day, watching his hands close around mine. Strong fingers, seamed with calluses. Steady, as they took the pregnancy stick away from me, held it closer to him.

I had that surreal feeling I sometimes get. Where I'm not present in my own life, but even all these years later, standing in my parents' kitchen again. Holding the shotgun. Smelling all that blood.

And Conrad, being Conrad, looked right at me. Looked right *into* me.

"Evie," he said. "You deserve this. *We* deserve this."

I loved him again. Just like that. In that moment, I adored him. We held hands. He cried. Then I had to pull away to vomit for real, but that made us both laugh, and afterward he'd wiped my face with a washcloth and I'd let him.

A thousand moments. A hundred memories.

That pain again, deep inside me, as I lean heavily against the wall, away from the bannister I no longer trust, and work my way up the narrow staircase.

Smell.

The odor hits me hard now. Nothing faint, teasing, ambiguous. This is it. Had I known all along? Turning into the drive? Pulling into the garage? The interior door open, open, open.

What had my subconscious suspected, long before the rest of me had paid attention?

Upstairs, not the bedroom, but the second tiny room, Conrad's office, looms to the left. That door is open, too.

Sounds to go with the smell. Sirens. Down the street. Growing louder. Coming closer. But of course.

My parents' kitchen.

My husband's office.

Blood.

Dark, viscous. A spray. A pool.

I can't help myself. I'm sixteen. I'm thirty-two. I reach out. I touch the spot closest to me. I smear the red across my fingertip. I watch the way it fills in the whorls of my fingerprints.

My father. My husband.

Blood.

More noise. Banging. So far away. Shouts and demands and orders.

But up here, none of it matters. There is just me and this final moment with Conrad. His body fallen back into the desk chair, the back of his head sprayed on the wall behind him.

I fear what I will see on the computer screen before I even look. But I force myself to do it. Take it in. Register the images. This is my husband's computer. This is what my husband was looking at before he died.

Harder banging now. The police. Responding to reports of shots fired. They will not be denied.

*"It was an accident,"* my mother whispers urgently in my ear. *"Nothing but an unfortunate accident."*

I reach over to the computer. I close out the images. Then, because I have enough experience to know it won't be enough, I pick up the gun from my husband's lifeless hand. I curl my palm around the checkered grip. I slip my finger into the cold trigger guard.

And I start shooting.

WHEN THE POLICE finally burst through the door, I stand at the top of the stairs, both hands up, gun in plain view, while turning slightly so that the curve of my stomach can't be denied.

"Drop the weapon, drop the weapon, drop the weapon!" the first officer shouts from the base of the stairs.

I do.

He scrambles up the stairs, cuffs in hands. I hope for his own sake that he doesn't stumble against the bannister.

A marriage is a mosaic. A thousand moments. A hundred memories.

The officer twists my arms behind my back. He cuffs my wrists tight, pats me down as if expecting even more weapons, as more uniforms pour through the door.

“My husband,” I hear myself say. “He’s been shot. He’s dead.”

“Ma’am, is there anyone else present?”

“No.”

A thousand moments. A hundred memories.

“Ma’am, you have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law. You have the right to speak to an attorney, and to have an attorney present during any questioning.”

The officer escorts me down the stairs, out of the house, away from my husband’s body.

“Do you think I’ll be allowed to plan the funeral?” I ask him.

He looks at me funny, then deposits me in the back of the patrol car on a hard plastic bench seat.

More cops. More sirens. The neighbors appearing to watch the show. I know what will come next. The trip to the police station. Where my hands will be swabbed for blood, tested for GSR. Fingerprinting. Processing.

Then, when my past appears on the computer screen . . .

“*An accident,*” my mother whispers again in the back of my mind. “*Nothing but an unfortunate accident.*”

I can’t help myself; I shudder.

She will come for me now, I think. And because of that, as much as anything else, I curl my hands around my belly and tell my baby, this fragile, fluttery life that hasn’t even had a chance yet, how sorry I truly am.

## CHAPTER 2

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### D.D.

“O KAY. JUST LIKE WE’VE DONE before. I’ll head straight. Alex will cut left. Jack, you ready?”

Jack nodded. Sergeant Detective D. D. Warren took a steadying breath. Three of them. One target. How badly could things go wrong?

First step forward. Light tread, heel, toe, designed not to make a sound. Alex utilized the same strategy, heading sideways to intercept the line of retreat. They’d done this enough times to know that silence was the key. Alert their opponent too early, and that was it. She was both faster and—D.D. was beginning to suspect—smarter than the three of them put together.

Which made the situation particularly dire, given that it was D.D.’s favorite black leather boot at stake.

She eased into the dining room, where Kiko had wisely retreated beneath the table with her prize. So far, the best spotted dog in all the land was lying contentedly on the rug, chewing on the heel of D.D.’s shoe, as D.D. and Alex made their circular approach.

Five-year-old Jack had taken up position in the family room. His job: catch Kiko when she inevitably bolted from beneath the cherry-wood table. They expected the dog would run toward Jack, her partner in crime. The two adults of the household, on the other hand . . .

A floorboard creaked beneath D.D.'s foot. She froze. Kiko looked up.

Time stood still. Detective and dog locked eyes, D.D. wearing one boot, Kiko holding the second between her paws.

Alex appeared in the left-hand doorway of the dining room. "Kiko! Release! Bad dog!"

Kiko grabbed the boot in her mouth and ran for it.

D.D. lunged to the right. An act of desperation, and she and the dog both knew it. Kiko, a Dalmatian–German shorthaired pointer mix who was all long legs and high energy, dodged the move effortlessly. Alex came charging from behind.

Kiko galloped straight for Jack, who cried out in boyish delight, "*Roo, roo, roo!*" right before he tossed Kiko's favorite toy straight up into the air.

True to form, Kiko dropped the boot and leapt up for her stuffed hippo.

D.D. snatched her boot. Kiko caught her toy. Then Kiko and Jack were off, tearing around the family room in a whirlwind of puppy-boy energy.

"Damage?" Alex asked, coming to a halt beside her. He was still trying to catch his breath. For that matter, so was D.D.

She inspected her boot. The bottom of the heel showed signs of chewing. But the leather upper was still intact.

"You gotta remember to put them in the closet," Alex said, eyeing the teeth marks.

"I know."

"She's going to grow out of it, but not overnight."

"I know!"

“So who do you think is going to take longer to train, her or you?”

D.D. growled at her husband. He grinned back.

“*Roo, roo, roo!*” Jack added from across the room. He was now standing on the sofa, springing up and down on the cushions, while Kiko matched him jump for jump from the floor. It had been Alex and Jack’s idea to adopt a dog from the local humane society. D.D., as sergeant detective of Boston homicide, had argued they weren’t home enough. To which Alex had ruthlessly replied that *she* wasn’t home enough. His job teaching crime scene analysis at the academy had set hours, and Jack’s schedule as a kindergartener was hardly grueling. A boy needs a dog, he’d told her.

Which, from what D.D. could tell, seemed to be true. Because God knows Jack and Kiko were already inseparable. The black-and-white-spotted one-year-old pup slept in Jack’s bed. Sat next to his feet at the kitchen table. And did everything the boy did, from leaping across the furniture to racing around the yard.

D.D.’s son was happy. Her husband was happy. In the end, a chewed boot heel seemed a small price to pay. That said, Kiko and Jack were now racing laps around the room.

“I gotta get to work,” D.D. said.

“Take me with you,” Alex tried.

“And rob you of this magic moment?”

“Pretty please?”

“Sorry.” D.D. was already sliding on her damaged boot. “Wife shot and killed her husband last night. She’s been arrested, but I want to check out the crime scene. Clearly, you’d be biased.”

“Woman’s already been charged,” Alex asked, “and you still need to visit the scene?” Following an on-the-job injury two years ago, D.D. had been moved to a supervisory position in homicide. As her fellow detectives would attest—and Alex would agree—D.D. took a much more hands-on approach with her management style than was strictly necessary.

“I have a personal interest in this one.” D.D. made it to the front door, eyed the crystalline sheen to the half-frozen ground outside, and grabbed her black wool coat. A month ago, the air had been crisp but the sun warm. And now this. Welcome to New England.

D.D. spared the twin racing streaks of her son and dog a second glance from the entryway, and despite the chaos—no, because of the chaos—felt the corresponding warmth in her chest. “They really do love each other.”

“Heaven help us,” Alex agreed. He stood close. They’d just had four whole days off together, a rare treat. As always, they both now felt the pull and pang of D.D.’s demanding job. Alex had always respected D.D.’s workaholic ways. But there were times, even for her, when disappearing down the rabbit hole that was a homicide investigation became difficult. Especially lately.

“Why is this case personal?” Alex asked.

D.D. buttoned her coat. “The woman in question, Evelyn Carter, née Hopkins, I investigated her for murder once before.”

“She killed a husband before this one?”

“Nope. She ‘accidentally’ shot her father. But, seriously, how many shootings can one woman be involved with?”

Alex nodded sagely. “You’re going to get her this time.”

D.D. smiled, stepped into her husband’s embrace for a quick kiss, then waved goodbye to her crazy kid and dog. “Totally.”

Evelyn Carter and her husband, Conrad, lived in Winthrop, one of the smallest and oldest towns in Massachusetts. Dating back to 1630 and positioned on a peninsula just miles from Logan Airport, the area offered views of the Atlantic for the lucky, and up-close-and-personal contact with densely packed homes for everyone else. The Carters’ residence was located on a street of modest, distinctly 1950s Colonials that had probably once been strictly working-class. Now, given property values in Boston, especially this close to the waterfront, God only knew. As it was, D.D. was surprised to see so



many of the original homes intact. These days, it felt like every neighborhood in Boston was being gentrified, developers coming in, razing the old, and replacing it with bigger and better. Personally, D.D. preferred a little character in a home, but then again, on a detective's salary she wouldn't be living in any of these neighborhoods anytime soon.

Her former squad mate and onetime mentor Phil had contacted her first thing this morning to fill her in on the shooting. Pretty straightforward case, in his opinion. Neighbors had called in reports of shots fired. Uniformed officers had responded to find the wife standing at the top of the stairs, gun still in hand. She had surrendered without incident and been taken to the South Bay House of Correction.

Pregnant, Phil had added. Far enough along to be noticeable, while not yet huge.

D.D. couldn't yet picture that. The Evie Hopkins she had known had been a sixteen-year-old girl. Thin, dirty-blond hair, huge, doe-like brown eyes as she'd sat at the kitchen table, mere feet from her father's blood-soaked body, shaking uncontrollably.

She hadn't cried. D.D., a new detective back then, had thought that odd. But there'd been something to the girl's flat expression, combined with her hard tremors, that had been compelling. Shock. A sort of delayed reaction to grief that made D.D. believe the girl was honestly in pain, only of such an extreme magnitude she couldn't comprehend it.

They hadn't been able to get her out of the kitchen and down to the station for proper processing. At the time, it hadn't seemed such a big deal. Evie, covered in blood, hadn't denied anything. The gun had gone off. Yes, she'd shot and killed her father.

And now her legs didn't seem to work. She couldn't stand, move. Short of physically picking her up, D.D. and her partner, an older

detective, Gary Speirs, couldn't get the girl out of the kitchen. Speirs had made the judgment call not to push it. He'd been afraid the girl would give over to hysterics, ending their interview once and for all.

So they'd all sat feet from the body, the spattered cabinets, the smeared refrigerator.

The mom had stayed in the front room. An actual parlor, which D.D. had found strangely mesmerizing. She'd heard of such things, but to actually see one . . . The Hopkinses lived in a beautiful historic Colonial in Cambridge, as befitting the father's position as a Harvard professor. Perfectly tended, everything in its place. Except, of course, for the crime scene in the kitchen.

Had it biased D.D. at the time? The upper-class home? The well-groomed mom? The obviously shell-shocked sixteen-year-old suspect, her thin shoulders shaking?

The mom, interviewed separately in the front parlor, had corroborated everything her daughter had reported. The shotgun had been a recent purchase given a rash of break-ins in the area. The father had been showing it to his daughter. She'd picked it up, was trying to figure out how to clear the chamber, when the gun had gone off, blasting her father in the chest from mere inches away. A tragic accident. Follow-up interviews revealed no reports of any ongoing rancor between the father and daughter. In fact, the entire family was described as good people, great neighbors. The daughter a gifted pianist. The wife active with literacy causes and aid for battered women. As cases went, it wasn't even one D.D. had wondered about in all the years since.

Now this.

Yellow crime scene tape roped off the front yard. Several open parking spaces had been secured, probably for the detectives who'd worked most of the night before finally taking off for home in the hours since. Only two official vehicles remained.

All in all, the house appeared quiet. No neighbors lurking outside. No crime scene techs bustling about or uniformed officers working the street. As Phil had said, a straightforward case. A man had been shot and killed. His wife was now sitting in county jail.

D.D. got out of her vehicle. She approached the front door, noting the splintered frame and skewed Christmas wreath. The police had had to force their way in. Interesting.

She entered. Like a lot of the homes hastily constructed postwar to accommodate the boom in young families, the house had a simple layout. Narrow staircase leading straight up against the wall to the left. Front-facing family room to the right. Tight hallway leading to a modest eat-in kitchen. Downstairs bath to the right. Mudroom area and garage access off the kitchen to the left.

The kitchen showed signs of recent updating. Fresh-painted pale-gray cabinets. New, solid-surface dark-flecked countertops. Stainless steel appliances. The hallway, on the other hand, with its ripped yellow wallpaper and scuffed wooden floors, was deeply in need of care.

Clearly a fixer-upper, though given modern tastes for open-area living, a tough one at that. Had the Carters been doing the work themselves?

Had they already started in on the nursery?

D.D. found herself with her hand resting on her belly. Hastily, she dropped it. Lately, she'd been thinking too much about the days she'd been pregnant with Jack. A child she'd never expected to have. Her greatest miracle and deepest love. Usually . . .

"Hey, there you are."

D.D. turned to find Detective Carol Manley standing in the hallway behind her. The petite investigator, just over five feet tall and barely a hundred pounds soaking wet, had taken D.D.'s place on her squad after D.D.'s injury. Manley was a perfectly good detective.

Both Phil and Neil seemed to like her and accept her as part of their three-person team. D.D., on the other hand, still didn't trust any cop named Carol.

Completely unreasonable, but there it was.

Now D.D. carefully schooled her features and reminded herself that part of her job was to play well with others. It was the part of her job she was worst at, but hey.

"Body was found upstairs," Carol was saying now. "Looks like she shot him sitting at his desk. Then shot up his laptop as well."

"Do we know motive?" D.D. fell in step behind Carol as the woman headed for the stairs.

"Wife isn't talking. Phil said you knew her."

"I questioned her regarding another shooting sixteen years ago. That one was ruled accidental. Though now I wonder."

"Watch the bannister," Carol commented as she headed up. "It's pretty loose. One of those things they must not have gotten around to fixing yet."

D.D. gave the wooden bannister an experimental shake; yep, it was definitely less than stable. "Don't suppose murder weapon was a shotgun?" D.D. asked.

"Nah. Sig Sauer P-two-two-six, registered to the vic, Conrad Carter. Looks like he kept the nine-mil in the top drawer of his nightstand."

"Where anyone could grab it."

"Ah, but the ammo was in a shoebox in the closet."

"Because clearly that provides security. Love 'smart' gun owners."

"And yet where would our job be without them?"

D.D. conceded the point. They arrived at the top. The landing was tiny. Only three doors to pick from. Two bedrooms and a bath, most likely. But D.D. didn't need to inspect all three to find the scene of the crime. Smell directed her enough.

Conrad had converted the smaller bedroom into a personal office. Massive executive-style black leather chair, the back now smeared with dark splotches of gore. A wall of waist-high laminate filing cabinets, covered in piles of paperwork and stacks of what appeared to be catalogues. Across from the filing cabinets, the room held a massive oak desk, currently riddled with enough bullet holes and metallic rubble to qualify it as a war vet.

Small space, D.D. thought, huge carnage. Clearly, the wife hadn't been messing around.

"The remains of the laptop?" D.D. asked, gesturing to the debris-strewn desk.

"Yep. Techs have it. Woman closed it up, then emptied her clip into it. Not a huge target, meaning our gal knew what she was doing."

"What do the techs think?"

"They need time to take the laptop apart and inspect the damage. There's a lot going on inside a laptop—battery, RAM, motherboard, Wi-Fi card, hard drive, thin hard drive, et cetera. So lots of things to hit, but in theory, also some things that could've been missed. Unfortunately, a dozen forty-caliber rounds to a target that small . . ."

D.D. arched a brow. "How many bullets to the husband?"

"Three."

The Sig P226 held fifteen rounds. Meaning: "Three to the husband, twelve into the computer? If we view the laptop as a second victim, certainly seems she hated the computer more."

"Or was a woman with something to hide."

"Trying to eradicate something on the laptop," D.D. followed. "Do we know if it was strictly the husband's computer, or did both of them share it?"

"Don't know."

“And she didn’t say anything to the police when they arrived? No ‘I had to do it,’ ‘he started it,’ ‘the voices in my head . . . ’ Anything?”

“She wanted to know if she could plan her husband’s funeral.”

D.D. shook her head. “What about her demeanor? Did the arresting officer describe her as appearing shocky, grief-stricken, relieved?”

“Calm and cooperative. Allowed herself to be cuffed and led to the patrol car. Was taken to the station and charged without incident.”

D.D. frowned, still not sure what to think. She studied the blood-smeared chair, the spatter across the far wall. “What did the husband do?”

“Sales. Worked for one of those custom window companies.” Carol pointed to the pile of catalogues on the filing cabinets. “According to the neighbors, he was on the road a fair amount, spec’ing out jobs, that sort of thing. But when he wasn’t traveling, he worked out of this office.”

“The contents of the filing cabinets?”

“Phil went through them. Seem to be customer files. Nothing out of the ordinary.”

D.D. nodded, returned to studying the damage. She should’ve brought Alex, she thought. This was how they’d met, analyzing spatter at the scene of a brutal family annihilation. What did it say about her life that studying a crime scene made her miss her husband?

“And Evie?” D.D. asked. “Her occupation?”

“Evelyn? She teaches algebra at the local high school.”

D.D. had to smile. “Her father was a prof at Harvard. Some kind of mathematical genius who taught classes where the names alone hurt my head.”

“She’s pregnant. Five months along.”

“Were they close to their neighbors? Get any good dirt?”

Carol shrugged. “People on the block had nothing bad to report. Couple bought the house four years ago. Been working on fixing it up as time allowed. Apparently in the summer, Evelyn liked to work in the yard. She’d wave when neighbors walked by but wasn’t exactly the chatty sort. *Quiet* was the word people used a lot. Conrad, on the other hand, was the social half of the pair. Much more likely to stop, hold court. But then again, uniforms couldn’t find any neighbors who’d been invited over for dinners, barbecues, drinks, whatever. Neighbors didn’t seem to take it personally as much as there was an assumption the Carters were a young, busy couple.”

“So by all appearances, a happy couple?”

“No reports of domestic disturbance calls or loud arguments.”

“And Evelyn, when she was arrested, bore no signs of a physical confrontation between her and the husband?”

“Not a mark on her.”

“Rules out self-defense.”

“But not battered woman’s syndrome,” Carol pointed out. “Some guys know how to hit where it doesn’t show, and if it was ongoing . . .”

“Never know what goes on behind closed doors,” D.D. agreed, thinking of that first crime scene, the stately Cambridge Colonial, the impeccably decorated front parlor. Again, had she, a rookie detective, let herself see only what outsiders were meant to see?

She gestured now to the gory wall before her. “Tell me about the husband’s body. Three shots fired?”

“Two to the chest, one to the head. Torso shots lodged somewhere inside, probably ricocheted around his ribs. Head shot was a through and through.”

Which would explain the far wall and the ongoing stench in the room.

“Close range?” D.D. asked.

“We’re still working on the trajectories, but yes, stippling around the entry wounds suggest a distance of less than two feet.”

D.D. considered the room, number of feet between the doorway and the desk chair. “Chair had to be facing the door, right?”

“Yep.”

“No defensive wounds on his hands, any sign of a previous altercation?”

“Negative.”

“Evelyn retrieves the gun from the bedroom,” D.D. thought out loud. “Loads it using the ammo from the closet.”

“We found the shoebox with ammo open on the bed, loose slugs next to it.”

“Walks into the office, maybe calls her husband’s name.”

“He turns around in his chair,” Carol filled in.

“She steps closer, opens fire. Quick. Has to be, for him to never even get a hand up. Just, ‘hey, honey,’ then, boom, boom, boom.”

“Or, ‘you bastard,’ boom, boom, boom.”

“Something like that,” D.D. agreed. “Three shots. Enough to make sure she definitely got the job done, but not so much that it’s a crime of passion. That, she saved for the laptop.” D.D. frowned. “I’d really like to know what was on that computer.”

Carol shrugged. “What would motivate a wife to kill her husband? Porn? E-mails from a girlfriend? Online gambling addiction? Plenty of things out there that would justify shooting up a husband and his laptop. Hell, maybe he was just that into video games, or she was just that hormonal from her pregnancy.”

D.D. gave the childless detective a look. “If pregnancy hormones led to homicide, there wouldn’t be a husband left alive. Plus, you said it yourself. Evelyn knew what she was doing during the shooting, and she was calm and cooperative afterwards. That’s not a woman on a rampage. There’s something else going on here. Something more.”



"How'd she look sixteen years ago?" Carol asked.

"Young and traumatized. I'm surprised, given that tragedy, she'd allow a gun in her home. You'd think she'd want to stay as far away from firearms as possible. And yet . . ." She glanced at Carol. "Two shots to the torso, one to the head, a dozen straight into the laptop. Even at such a close range, to never miss . . ."

"Sounds like a woman with some training," Carol agreed. "Maybe the ol' face-your-fears sort of thing? After the last shooting, she wanted to make sure she never had an 'accident' ever again. Took some classes, joined a local firing range?"

"Definitely worth pursuing. Her hands were tested for GSR?"

"Absolutely. Tested positive. Not to mention the flecks of blood we found on her clothes, more on her hands."

"She did this," D.D. stated. "Evelyn Carter shot and killed her husband."

"Open-and-shut. Police responded to sound of shots fired. Found her standing at the top of stairs still holding the Sig. Never even denied it."

"The police forced their way into the house. Why?"

"They heard more gunshots."

"But the initial call out was due to neighbors reporting gunfire. How long did it take police to respond?"

"Eight minutes."

D.D. tilted her head. "So fifteen shots were fired over the course of eight minutes?" She eyed the detective.

Carol merely shrugged. "We're still gathering facts. But my guess, first round was Evelyn killing her husband. Second round—when the police arrived—was Evelyn taking out the computer."

"With a gap in between. While she was doing . . . ?"

"Who knows. Closing out files on the computer, maybe? Trying to cover something up? Then, when she heard the sirens, realized

the police were closing in . . . she decided on a more definitive approach.”

It was possible, D.D. thought, but also a lot of conjecture. “Covering something up?” she murmured, more to herself than anyone. “Or backing something up?”

“What do you mean?”

“Clearly the laptop held something significant. Did she just want it destroyed, or was there also data she wanted to retrieve? E-mail address of her husband’s alleged lover, I don’t know. But eight minutes . . . It doesn’t take eight minutes to close out files or shut down a computer. It could take eight minutes, however, to back up desired data.”

Carol nodded slowly. “All right. I’ll check on it. If she copied data, it’d have to be to a thumb drive. She didn’t have anything on her when she was processed at South Bay. So maybe she stashed it around the house? I’ll take a look.”

“Something else you should know: Evie’s father, the Harvard prof, was known for his photographic memory. It was part of the reason for his success in his field. All he had to do was glance at something once, and he retained the image forever.”

“Meaning Evelyn . . . ?”

“Maybe she didn’t have to back anything up. Maybe she just had to look.”

“Lovely,” Carol murmured.

D.D. smiled. “Nothing to worry about, right? Like you said. Open-and-shut.”

Carol muttered again. This time, the word was not lovely.

D.D. left the detective to take a fresh look at the crime scene. She’d just exited the house when she noticed the person standing across the street. A lone female. Blond hair. Gray eyes. Deceptively slight build.

Flora Dane. Onetime kidnapping victim. Current survivors' advocate / vigilante. Also D.D.'s newest confidential informant. Just a month ago, they'd worked together to find a sixteen-year-old girl who'd disappeared after the murder of her entire family—if *working together* was a phrase that could be used for either D.D. or Flora.

Now D.D. frowned, stared across the street.

"What?" she called out. Because where Flora appeared, trouble usually followed.

Flora didn't approach. She shifted from foot to foot, hunching her shoulders inside her oversized down-filled jacket. If D.D. didn't know any better, she'd say the young woman looked nervous.

Another moment passed. D.D. sighed, crossed the street herself. Flora was staring at the Carters' house as if she were trying dissect all the contents while peering straight through the exterior walls. The girl had many talents—including lock picking and chemical fire—but D.D. didn't think X-ray vision was among them.

"What?" D.D. asked again.

"I saw his picture, on the news."

"You mean the victim? Conrad Carter?"

"His wife shot him?"

"Appears to be the case. Why?" asked D.D. "You know Evie?" Flora ran a support group for survivors. Maybe, after the death of her father at her own hands, that was how Evelyn saw herself. Anything was possible.

"No. Not her. Him. I recognized him." Flora glanced at her, and D.D. knew that her notoriously hard-edged CI was indeed nervous. "I met him before. In a bar. When I was with Jacob."

Jacob Ness was the man who'd kidnapped and raped Flora for four hundred and seventy-two days. He'd died six years ago, during the FBI raid to rescue her.

D.D. had that feeling again. Of knowing only that she didn't

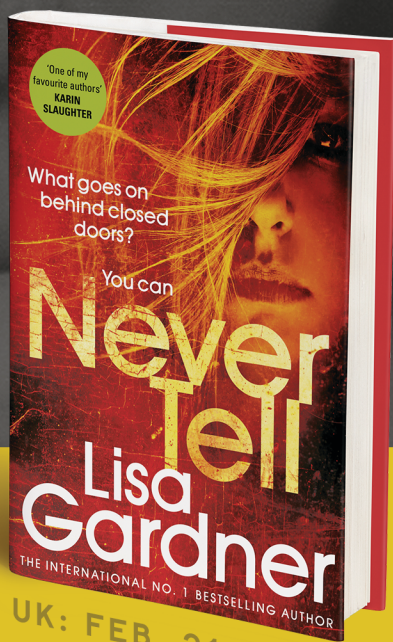
know enough. That Evie Carter had reappeared in her life, and it was going to bite her in the ass.

“Flora—”

“Jacob knew him,” her CI whispered. Flora stared at D.D. with stark gray eyes. “Conrad Carter. Jacob Ness. I think . . . I’m pretty sure they might have been acquaintances.”



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