

A yellow, rounded rectangular sign hangs from a dark, polished door handle. The sign is attached to the handle by a small metal ring. The background is a dark, textured wooden door with vertical grain lines. The sign has the words "DO NOT DISTURB" printed in large, bold, black capital letters.

**DO
NOT
DISTURB**

#1 BESTSELLING AUTHOR
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Do Not Disturb

a novel by

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Do Not Disturb

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To Libby and Mel

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CHAPTER 1

QUINN

While I'm washing the blood off my hands in the kitchen sink, the doorbell rings.

I freeze, my hands full of pink suds, the steaming hot water causing my fingers to burn and tingle. There's somebody at the door. Somebody waiting patiently on the front porch for me to answer. The timing couldn't be worse.

Could it be a package delivery? Maybe they'll drop the package at the door and go away. Or else leave me a note. *Sorry we missed you! We'll be back tomorrow!*

And then: three hard raps on the front door.

"Coming!" I call out in a strangled voice, even though it's unlikely they'll hear me. I scrub furiously at my fingers, and then at my fingernails, where the blood seems to have settled into the cracks. Who knew it was so hard to get blood off your hands? "Just a minute!"

I shut off the hot water and examine my palms, flipping them this way and that. Good enough? It'll have to be. I wipe them dry on a light green dish towel, leaving a smear of red behind. Damn, I didn't get it all—I'll have to wash my hands again.

As soon as I get rid of whoever is at the front door.

My heels clack against the linoleum floor of the kitchen, then go soft when they hit the plush carpeting in the living room. Derek and I pored over carpet swatches for hours before settling on the charcoal-colored carpet that now goes wall-to-wall across our vast living room. The carpet feels lovely when I'm in my bare feet, and I'm glad I held out for a darker color instead of a pale shade that would show every fleck of dirt. Our carpet can easily hide dust and debris.

Bloodstains too, apparently.

As I hurry to the front door, I glimpse bright lights through the windows. Red and blue flashing simultaneously. That can mean only one thing.

There's a cop at my door.

Oh God. No no no no no...

I take a split second to compose myself. *Keep it together, Quinn.* I take a deep breath, trying to get my hands to stop shaking. It doesn't work. So I go ahead and open the door.

I was right. It's a police officer at my door. Not just a police officer, but it's Scotty Dwyer, although he goes by Scott now, or else Deputy Dwyer. About a million years ago, when we were in high school, Scott and I used to date. I remember how awkwardly cute I thought he was, with his red-brown hair that always stuck up straight and all the freckles on his face. But then high school ended, I went off to college, and he went to work for his father's grocery store. I don't even remember breaking up with him, but the long-distance phone calls became less frequent, and one day during my freshman year, I realized we weren't together anymore.

Now Scotty is a policeman with a uniform and a real badge and everything. He used to be skinny as a rail, but now he fills out his dark blue uniform rather nicely. The freckles have faded, and he's tamed his hair, although he still looks boyishly handsome.

That's the problem with moving back to the town where I grew up. Everyone I run into is the boy I went out with in high school or the kid who saw me throw up in the locker room or the girl who didn't invite me to her birthday party. It's exhausting.

But sometimes it can work to my advantage.

"Hey, Quinn." Scott smiles at me, but his face is serious. This isn't a social call—not that I would have expected it, since I have barely spoken to Scott in the last ten years. "Is everything okay?"

I wipe my hands self-consciously on my gray pencil skirt. "Sure. Of course. Why?"

"Well..." Scott's light brown eyes dart behind me, scanning my living room. The buttery leather sofa, the matching loveseat and ottoman, the wide screen television with surround sound, the photographs on our mantle of our recent skiing trip to Vale. "We got a phone call. One of your neighbors said they heard screaming coming from your house."

"Screaming?" I paste what I think is a very realistic looking smile on my face. "That's so strange! Are they sure it was coming from here?"

His eyes lock with mine. "That's what they said, yes."

I screw up my face, pretending to think about it. Finally, I snap my fingers. “Oh! You know what it was? I was watching a movie on TV, and then I went out to the kitchen and I turned the volume way up. So they probably heard the movie.”

He nods, considering this. Everyone says Scott is a good policeman—kind but thorough. I squeeze my hands into fists, waiting to see if he buys my story. I look down at my trembling hands again, scared they might give me away. And that’s when I notice it.

A crimson dot on my gray skirt.

Oh God, how did I miss it? How did I let myself answer the door with a drop of blood on my skirt? I quickly avert my eyes, trying not to draw attention to it. If he sees it, he’ll insist on coming inside. And if he does, I’m finished.

“What movie?” he finally asks.

“Well,” I say, “it was *Scream*. You know, with Neve Campbell and Courteney Cox?”

He clears his throat. “The one with the masks, right?”

“Right. So obviously, there was, you know, *screaming*.” I smile apologetically. “I’m sorry if somebody got worried. But you can see there’s no disturbance here.”

“Uh huh...”

I hold my breath, keeping my eyes pointed straight ahead. I send Scott a subliminal message: *Don’t look down. Please don’t look down.*

Scott tilts his head to the side. “Are you alone here?”

I play with my hair, trying for casual and flirty. Easy, breezy. *Nothing to see here, Officer.* “Yep. Just little ol’ me. Derek is still at work.”

Don’t look down. Please...

Finally, he nods his head. “Okay. Sorry to bother you. I just wanted to make sure everything was all right.”

“Of course!” I laugh, hoping it doesn’t sound as weird to him as it does to me. “I’m glad you came. It makes me feel safe to know you’re out there protecting me.”

Scott’s cheekbones turn just the slightest bit pink. When we were in high school and he was embarrassed, his whole face would turn scarlet. “Just doing my job.”

“I appreciate it. And next time, I promise I’ll keep the volume down. Especially when I’m watching scary movies!”

He wags a finger at me. “You do that.”

“And we should catch up sometime,” I add. “Derek and I would love to have you over for dinner.”

“Sounds great, Quinn.”

Scott doesn’t want to have dinner with me and Derek. But that’s fine, since it wasn’t a genuine invitation, anyway.

He ambles down my front steps, and then down my driveway to his parked police car with the flashing red and blue lights. I never quite meant to break up with Scotty Dwyer, but now, for the first time, I wonder what my life would have been like if I hadn’t. If I had married a good, honorable man of the law instead of Derek, the man that I chose. I wouldn’t be standing here with blood on my skirt and on the soles of my shoes. That much is for sure.

I shut the door, but I keep watching Scott through the front window. I watch as he starts up the engine and pulls onto the road, and I don’t look away until his car is out of sight.

He’s gone. Thank God.

Now that he’s out of sight, I inspect my skirt. The drop of blood is about half a centimeter in diameter. I’ve never attempted to get blood out of my clothing before, but I have a bad feeling my best work skirt is ruined. Then again, that’s the least of my problems.

I walk back out to the kitchen, examining the carpet for signs of bloody footprints. The kitchen looks about the same as how I left it a few minutes ago. The sink faucet is dripping like it always does. There’s still that crimson smear on the green dish towel. The three plates I left in the drying rack are still lined up in a row. The refrigerator has that note taped up that I wrote to myself to remember to buy more paper towels.

And also, my husband is still lying dead on the kitchen floor in a pool of blood.