



"An emotionally charged,
twisty, and haunting thriller
you won't soon forget."

—LISA JEWELL

HOME IS WHERE THE BODIES ARE

New York Times bestselling author

JENEVA ROSE



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“It’s an odd feeling to read something that feels so nostalgic and relatable yet still surprises you at the turn of every page. *Home Is Where the Bodies Are* is fast-paced and fresh and will have you rushing to your parents’ attic to unearth your own dark family secrets.”

—**Ashley Flowers,**

#1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *All Good People Here*

“*Home Is Where the Bodies Are* is fast-paced and propulsive with characters you truly empathize with and an ending so surprising and satisfying, you’ll immediately recommend this book to all of your friends. This is Jeneva Rose at her best.”

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“Sharp writing, a breakneck pace, and a surprisingly tender heart make this story of familial loyalty, grief, and murder impossible to put down.”

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“Rose demonstrates a formidable command of character . . .

Fans will enjoy the ride.”

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“A tense and harrowing story of family tragedy, lifelong secrets, and unresolved childhood jealousies. Rose’s deep insight into the complexities of human nature and her gorgeous prose carried me along in a single breathless read. Deeply moving and utterly engaging, readers will love this book!”

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“[An] original, fast-paced, flawless thriller . . .

Jeneva Rose is a powerhouse of an author, and an exceptionally talented writer. Sign me up for whatever she comes up with next!”

—Hannah Mary McKinnon,

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“A gripping tale of buried secrets penned by one of the best. Plenty of lies, and plenty of sinister videotapes.”

—Peter Swanson,

New York Times bestselling author of *The Kind Worth Killing*

“A dark and twisty take on grief, sibling rivalry, and the bodies, quite literally, buried in one family’s past, *Home Is Where the Bodies Are* is a wild ride.”

—Stacy Willingham,

New York Times bestselling author of *Only if You're Lucky*

“Answers are hard to come by in this twisting tale designed to trick and delight.”

—Kirkus Reviews

“Shockingly clever! Jeneva Rose plumbs the depths of how well we know the people we love to new and terrifying effects. Will grip you till the climactic end.”

—Lisa Gardner,

#1 *New York Times* bestselling author

“With atmospheric prose and a propulsive plot, *Home Is Where the Bodies Are* is an emotionally charged, twisty, and haunting thriller you won’t soon forget.”

—**Lisa Jewell,**

#1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *None of This Is True*

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Home Is Where the Bodies Are

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HOME IS WHERE THE BODIES ARE

JENEVA ROSE



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To my family.

*You've never had to hide a body, but I know you would,
if needed. Dad sure had us pour a lot of concrete though,
so who knows what's under there?*

CONTENTS

Prologue

1. Beth
2. Michael
3. Beth
4. Beth
5. Nicole
6. Beth
7. Nicole
8. Beth
9. Nicole
10. Laura
11. Nicole
12. Beth
13. Beth
14. Nicole
15. Laura
16. Beth
17. Nicole
18. Beth
19. Laura
20. Beth
21. Beth
22. Nicole
23. Michael
24. Beth
25. Laura
26. Michael
27. MISSING TEEN: Police ask for public's help to find 17-year-old girl
28. Laura
29. Nicole
30. Laura

30. [Michael](#)
31. [Nicole](#)
32. [Laura](#)
33. [Beth](#)
34. [Nicole](#)
35. [Laura](#)
36. [Beth](#)
37. [Michael](#)
38. [Laura](#)
39. [Nicole](#)
40. [Beth](#)
41. [Nicole](#)
42. [Beth](#)
43. [Nicole](#)
44. [Beth](#)
45. [Nicole](#)
46. [Laura](#)
47. [Beth](#)
48. [Nicole](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[About the Author](#)

PROLOGUE

Nothing brings people together better than death. It's like the sound of a high-pitched whistle for a dog that has strayed from its owner. When it happens, they always come. Death reminds us that life isn't infinite and that one day, our time will come too. We pause to listen to that reminder, to acknowledge it, to show it the respect it demands, and then we spread out into the world like pappi on a dying dandelion, waiting for it to call us again, hoping the next call will be to gather, rather than to be gathered around.

Knock, knock.

Don't worry. It's not for you . . . this time.

ONE

BETH

The rain falls differently today, not soft, not hard, not sideways, just different. As though it's preparing my mother's final resting place, saturating the ground where she will soon lie. The hospice nurse said she'll pass by the end of the day. It's odd. Some people never see it coming, others have a countdown, and I don't know which is worse.

I stare out the kitchen window, which overlooks five acres of property, a mix of trees, hills, flat grassy land, and a creek that cuts through it all. My parents purchased the land from a farmer back in the late seventies and had a home built here shortly after. It was their little slice of paradise—until it wasn't.

My phone buzzes. A text from my brother. His flight has landed, and he'll be home in under an hour. *Home?* He stopped visiting seven years ago, when our father disappeared. So, I wouldn't call our small Wisconsin town his home. Only one hundred and seventy-four people can call it that, but not him. Most people who leave the Grove don't come back. And those that do never return because they want to. It's kind of like a cemetery in that way.

I flick to the text I sent my sister hours ago. It's unread. She's probably strung out in some motel, a needle wedged between her toes because her veins collapsed long before she caught up with that high she's been chasing

all her life. I let out a heavy sigh at the mere thought of my sister. Addiction is exhausting for both the users and the ones they use.

I pull a loaf of white bread from the cupboard and slather a heavy helping of mayo on two slices. A bowl of round and supple beefsteak tomatoes, plucked from the garden, sits beside the sink. I place the ripest one on the worn cutting board. Tomato water seeps from the flesh as my knife slides through it. I'm not sure why I'm even making Mom a tomato-mayo sandwich. She hasn't eaten anything in days but it's her favorite, she says. She grew up dirt-poor, so her favorites are her favorites because she hasn't experienced anything better. I always wanted to do more for her, to show her a world outside of the Grove—but I never got out either.

"Eliza . . . beth," my mother calls softly from the living room. She says my name the same way she consumes her Werther's candies: slowly, deliberately. It's like she's savoring it. My shoulders drop, sinking to a place familiar to those who have faced defeat. I know I'll never hear her say it again—my name, the one she gave me. I wish I could reach out and grab it, stow it away in a safe place, like some sort of family heirloom. But it belongs to this moment. Like her, it's not something I can keep forever. I take a deep breath and release the knife from my hand. It thuds against the cutting board. It's time to say my final goodbye.

The clock on the wall reads just after eight p.m. My siblings most likely won't make it in time. Then again, they've had all the time in the world to be here with her, and they chose not to. So, perhaps they don't deserve it. *Death waits for no one.*

"Coming, Mom." I force the corners of my lips up a few clicks before leaving the kitchen. All she ever wanted was to see her children happy—I can do that for her, even if it's not true.

The living room was converted into her bedroom three months ago. She wanted it that way, wanted to be able to look out the big bay window and

watch the sun set. Mom worked second shift most of her life, so she said it was the one thing she felt she missed out on.

A television sits in the corner, muted, with a car dealership commercial playing on the screen. Most of my mom's belongings are floral print: the blanket covering her, the couch that has been pushed to the far wall, and the decorative pillows placed on either end. There are even pictures of flowers hung in frames behind her hospice bed. She told me flowers reminded her of life—beautiful, delicate, and short-lived.

Her bed sits propped up, and she's looking out the window.

"Hi, Mom," I say. My voice nearly croaks but I swallow the sadness. I'll break that dam later, but not now, not in front of her.

She lifts her hand shakily an inch above her lap and lets it fall back into place. She doesn't have the strength to say it, but I can hear her words, *Come watch the sunset, Beth.*

"Okay, Mom."

I take a seat in the chair beside her bed. It's molded to my behind, from all the hours I've sat with her over the past few months. She got real bad seven weeks ago, so I took FMLA leave from my job at the warehouse to care for her around the clock. Mom would have had more time, but she's a stubborn woman who visits the doctor about as often as one visits the DMV. By the time they caught the cancer, it was far too advanced, having spread to her liver and bloodstream.

She wiggles her thin fingers, and I reach for them, gently holding her hand. The rain has stopped temporarily. The clouds part and the sky shifts to a perfect blue, layered with hues of pink and orange from the setting sun.

"It's beautiful, Mom," I say, glancing over at her.

Her graying skin is like the bark of a tree, deep creases from a lifetime of stress and grief. She embraces them, though. She always has, proudly saying, "The wrinklier the skin, the harder the life." It's a badge of honor for her, evidence of her hardships.

Her chest barely rises and falls. I watch it closely just to be sure she's still breathing. She keeps her eyes on the setting sun, and I can hear what she said to me a week ago, before it became too difficult for her to utter more than a word or two.

There's not many things you can count on in life, but that . . . is one thing you can count on. It will rise and it will fall—no matter what. Don't matter if you're sick or sad. Don't matter if there is war or there is peace. Don't matter if you see it or you don't. That sun. You can count on it.

Even in her dying days, she's still trying to teach me, to guide me, to show her love her way—through lessons and words of wisdom. I squeeze her hand gently, so she knows I'm still here. The small pressure seems to push through her body, constricting the very air in her lungs. She begins to wheeze. I dunk a sponge into a glass of water and squeeze the liquid into her partially open mouth. Mom never takes her eyes off the sun. I dab her chapped lips with the damp sponge and sit back down while she catches what little breath she has left.

When the sun finally slips behind the horizon, she cranes her neck toward me. I smile at her, but she doesn't smile back. I know death is near because even her presence has dulled.

"Hi, Mom," I say. I'm trying to say Mom as many times as I possibly can because I know I'll never call another person that again. It's reserved only for her. There is no replacement. My throat tightens, and I feel my breath hitch like I'm going to experience one of those cries that comes from the deepest place, one that hurts, one you can't stop, one that makes every part of you quake and tremble. I reach for her hand and hold it again. It feels cold, and I know what that means.

She looks at me or maybe a little above me, I'm not sure. There's confusion in her eyes. She knew death was coming, but even so, its arrival is always puzzling. It's like we're all standing in one big queue waiting for our number to be called, thinking that day won't arrive—but it will, and it

has. She tries to roll her body toward me but she's too weak, so I lean closer to her. With only a foot between us, I notice her breathing changes from slow and shallow to rapid. It's almost here, and there are so many things I want to tell her. But I know it would take a lifetime to say them all, so I try to get out what I can.

"I love you, Mom. Thank you for having me, for raising me, for loving me, for being like the sun . . . the one thing I could always count on." My voice trembles. It's not at all how I wanted to say it. My face crumples and instantly becomes wet, the dam bursting open all at once. Her eyes flicker with realization or something like it.

"Your father . . ." she gasps.

I lean a little closer. "What, Mom? What about Dad?"

"He didn't . . ." She tries to suck in more air, so she can get the words out . . . words that must have been living inside of her. Had they been tangled up with the cancer and that's why she's only able to speak them now?

"Dis . . . appear," she stammers.

I blink rapidly, like I'm trying to wake myself from a bad dream.

"Mom, what are you trying to say? If he didn't disappear, where is he?" My voice rattles. I don't understand any of it.

"Don't," she says. Her eyes close for a moment, and I think she's gone. But they reopen just as quickly as they closed. "Trust," she gasps.

"Mom! I don't understand. Where's Dad?" I cry out.

She exhales, trying to finish her final words, but nothing more comes out, save for her last breath. Her cold hand goes limp in mine. It's true what they say about the lights going out when a person passes. Her eyes sit still and dark. Her mouth hangs partially open.

She's gone.

She's gone.

I let out a painful sob while her final words string together in my mind.

Your father. He didn't disappear. Don't trust . . .