

An aerial photograph of a two-lane asphalt road that curves through a dense, dark green forest. A small white car is visible on the road, driving away from the viewer. The road has white lane markings. The forest is thick with evergreen trees.

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

J.T. ELLISON

AUTHOR OF A VERY BAD THING

LAST SEEN

"Wherever J.T. Ellison goes, I want to follow."

—LISA GARDNER, #1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

PRAISE FOR J.T. ELLISON

Last Seen

"My favorite kind of thriller—dark family secrets, high-stakes mystery, and a shocked daughter who will stop at nothing to determine the truth. Wherever J.T. Ellison goes, I want to follow."

—Lisa Gardner, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Still See You Everywhere*

"In *Last Seen*, J.T. Ellison weaves a gripping tale of family secrets, broken trust, and the slippery nature of memory. When Halley James learns her mother was murdered—not killed in an accident—her search for the truth leads to a deceptively perfect town hiding dark secrets. With twists that keep you guessing, this masterfully crafted thriller showcases Ellison at the top of her game."

—Liv Constantine, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Last Mrs. Parrish*

"Darkly original and bursting with hold-your-breath suspense, *Last Seen* by J.T. Ellison is a haunting deep dive into a harrowing crime, buried memories, and one woman's obsession to discover the truth no matter the consequences. At the top of her game, Ellison's expert storytelling is on full display—*Last Seen* is a must-read for thriller fans."

—Heather Gudenkauf, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Overnight Guest* and *The Perfect Hosts*

"If someone lies about the things that matter most to you, it's your right, isn't it, to go after the truth? So, bravo to fearless forensic scientist Halley James for daring to peel away the layers of deceit in this dark, twisty, and gripping thriller that grabs you, pulls you in,

and keeps you guessing until you reach the final page with your heart pounding in your chest.”

—Kate White, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Last Time She Saw Him*

A Very Bad Thing

“[T]his novel rewards readers who pay close attention to the clues. A fun, fast-paced thriller that keeps secrets until the very last page.”

—*Library Journal*

“Once again, J.T. Ellison hits it out of the park. *A Very Bad Thing* is twisting, juicy, suspenseful, and heartfelt—a single-sitting read. I couldn’t put it down.”

—Meg Gardiner, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author

“*A Very Bad Thing* is a wonderfully smart, twisty psychological thriller infused with dark secrets, high drama, and edgy tension. Wow, what a ride!”

—Jayne Ann Krentz, *New York Times* bestselling author

“J.T. Ellison delivers yet again. *A Very Bad Thing* sizzles from page one. Moving at breakneck speed, Ellison’s latest explores the complex relationships between mothers and daughters and delivers twists and turns that make for an irresistible read.”

—Lori Roy, Edgar Award-winning author of *Lake County*

“A world-famous author, a devoted daughter, a persistent journalist, and one shocking murder—master storyteller J.T. Ellison has penned another winner to keep us up at night. In *A Very Bad Thing*, Ellison delves into the complex nature of mother-daughter relationships, the price of fame, and the danger of long-held secrets in this addictive, impossible-to-put-down thriller. Loved it!”

—Heather Gudenkauf, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Overnight Guest*

"J.T. Ellison once again crafts a deliciously suspenseful mystery with the pacing of a top-notch thriller. Just when you think Ellison can't top herself, she does, and *A Very Bad Thing* proves it. Compelling characters, a twisty mystery, and a propulsive story, I savored the book through the very last page."

—Allison Brennan, *New York Times* bestselling author of *You'll Never Find Me*

It's One of Us

"A smart, taut, mind-blowing thriller full of heartbreak and betrayal that moves along at breakneck speed. *It's One of Us* is a force to be reckoned with. I've always been a fan, but Ellison has outdone herself with this one. Readers will be obsessed!"

—Mary Kubica, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Just the Nicest Couple*

"Betrayal, obsession, and familial ties that bind create a tension-filled story with an intriguing theme. Readers will race through the pages to an end they didn't see coming."

—*Library Journal*, starred review

"A heart-stoppingly tense thriller about the price of secrets and the layers behind every marriage."

—Ruth Ware, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Woman in Cabin 10*

"J.T. Ellison has done the impossible by crafting a riveting domestic thriller full of twists and turns, but also heart and emotion. You'll root for her heroine Olivia Bender every step of the way, as soon as

a knock on the door brings shocking news that threatens her marriage and her world. You won't be able to put this novel down!"

—Lisa Scottoline, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Loyalty*

"Expertly explores the intensely complex emotions surrounding infertility, loss, and marriage. Throw in murder, a vivid cast of characters, and shocking secrets, Ellison masterfully mines the human heart in this treasure of a thriller that will keep readers turning the pages long into the night."

—Heather Gudenkauf, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Overnight Guest*

"J.T. Ellison is one of my favorite authors. I eagerly await everything she writes. And in *It's One of Us* she is at the very top of her formidable game. Don't miss this layered, emotional, and twisting thrill ride."

—Lisa Unger, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Secluded Cabin Sleeps Six*

"Beautifully written and impossible to put down, master storyteller J.T. Ellison will have you spellbound with this deeply layered psychological thriller. Immersive and propulsive, *It's One of Us* keeps you turning pages with an ending you'll never see coming. I loved it!"

—Liv Constantine, bestselling author of *The Last Mrs. Parrish*

"An extremely compelling thriller shot through with twists and turns, a strong emotional pulse, and heartfelt exploration of the pressures of marriage and starting a family. Impressive and gripping."

—Gilly Macmillan, internationally bestselling author of *The Long Weekend*

"Brings all the twists, chills, and thrills I expect from the preternaturally gifted Ellison, and it's also an emotionally resonant read that I can't wait to recommend to my book club. The secrets

snarled in the threads of an unraveling marriage and a heroine who wholly won me over put this one on my keeper shelf—you are going to love it!”

—Joshilyn Jackson, *New York Times* bestselling author of *With My Little Eye*

“One of the most compelling psychological suspense stories I’ve read in years.”

—Jacquelyn Mitchard, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Deep End of the Ocean*

“This gripping, breathless thriller adds an incredibly unique premise and delivers a novel that’s also a deeply poignant story about our deepest desire for love, family, and happiness.”

—Hannah Mary McKinnon, internationally bestselling author of *Never Coming Home*

“*It’s One of Us* is an emotional and thrilling psychological journey through the shadows of the human heart. Just when you think you know what’s coming, prepare to gasp with each new revelation. Through multiple fascinating points of view, layers of secrets, lies, love, and loss are revealed. I did not put this book down until the last unexpected and breathless page. Unpredictable, intense, and riveting, J.T. Ellison is at her heart-stopping best.”

—Patti Callahan Henry, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Once Upon a Wardrobe*

“The perfect mix of edge-of-your-seat tension, deep emotion, and impeccably developed characters, J.T. Ellison’s latest is a masterclass in storytelling. Secrets and lies, love and loss mix flawlessly to create a novel that touches every single emotion. Fans of Lisa Jewell and Ruth Ware will flock to *It’s One of Us*, and book clubs won’t be able to stop talking about it. Five dazzling stars.”

—Kristy Woodson Harvey, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Wedding Veil*

"An extraordinary, unpredictable, absolutely riveting thriller and a fiercely insightful, emotional journey, this is psychological suspense at its most enthralling and intense."

—Jayne Ann Krentz, *New York Times* bestselling author

"Secrets and lies abound, relationships are tested, and the twists keep coming. Ellison outdid herself, a master storyteller. This is a must read, especially the author's note at the end, which gutted me."

—Kerry Lonsdale, *Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post*, and Amazon Charts bestselling author

Her Dark Lies

"J.T. Ellison weaves the old and the new, art and history, mystery and love story into one stunning tapestry of a novel. Elegant, propulsive, and utterly unputdownable, *Her Dark Lies* is the work of one of our most talented thriller writers at the very top of her game."

—Lisa Unger, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Confessions on the 7:45*

"I loved *Her Dark Lies*. A great modern gothic. Ellison outdid herself—what an ending!"

—Catherine Coulter, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Vortex*

"Stunning. *Her Dark Lies* is a gorgeously atmospheric thriller, a brilliant contemporary twist on a beloved classic. Beautifully written, psychologically chilling, and gaspingly surprising, J.T. Ellison proves she's our new Daphne du Maurier."

—Hank Phillippi Ryan, *USA Today* bestselling author of *The First to Lie*

"Mesmerizing . . . Fans of Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* will want to check out this compulsively readable tale."

—*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

"A compulsive, twisty thriller that is so deftly crafted, you're left wondering who to trust. A highly addictive and deliciously tense read, *Her Dark Lies* is fast paced and full of suspense. This book is a stunner! Readers are going to love it. I'm a forever fan, and I want more."

—Kerry Lonsdale, *Wall Street Journal* and *Washington Post*
bestselling author

Good Girls Lie

"[A] high-tension thriller . . . Alternating points of view raise the suspense, blurring the lines between what's true and false."

—*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

"Ellison has created a complex, convoluted plot that mystery fans will savor."

—*Library Journal*

"*Good Girls Lie* is an entertainingly twisted coming-of-age tale, pitting the desire for privacy against the corrosiveness of secrecy and taking an often harrowing look at how wealth and power can lull recipients into believing they're untouchable."

—*BookPage*

Tear Me Apart

"Outstanding . . . Ellison is at the top of her game."

—*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

"A compelling story with a moving message."

—*Booklist*

"Well paced and creative . . . An inventive thriller with a horrifying reveal and a happy ending."

—*Kirkus Reviews*

Lie to Me

"Exceptional . . . Ellison's best work to date."

—*Publishers Weekly*

"Comparisons to *Gone Girl* due to the initial story structure are expected, but Ellison has crafted a much better story that will still echo long after the final page is turned."

—*Associated Press*

"Immensely readable . . . lush."

—*Booklist*

"Fans of Paula Hawkins, A.S.A. Harrison, Mary Kubica, and Karin Slaughter will want to add this to their reading list."

—*Library Journal*

"Wonderful . . . A one-more-chapter, don't-eat-dinner, stay-up-late sensation."

—Lee Child, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author

"Fans of *Gone Girl* will gobble up this thriller about a marriage from hell, which moves at a blazing-fast pace and smoothly negotiates more twists and turns than the back roads of Tennessee. J.T. Ellison will keep you guessing every step of the way to the surprise ending!"

—Lisa Scottoline, *New York Times* bestselling author of *One Perfect Lie*

"A wickedly good thriller about a picture-perfect marriage that is anything but, *Lie to Me* has it all: murder, lies, and betrayal. J.T.

Ellison will have readers hanging onto the edge of their seats with her latest cunning tale."

—Mary Kubica, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Good Girl*

LAST
SEEN

ALSO BY J.T. ELLISON

Stand-Alone Novels

A Very Bad Thing

It's One of Us

Her Dark Lies

Good Girls Lie

Tear Me Apart

Lie to Me

No One Knows

Taylor Jackson Series

All the Pretty Girls

14

Judas Kiss

The Cold Room

The Immortals

So Close the Hand of Death

Where All the Dead Lie

Field of Graves

Whiteout (novella)

Blood Sugar Baby (novella)

The Wolves Come at Night

Samantha Owens Series

A Deeper Darkness

Edge of Black
When Shadows Fall
What Lies Behind

A Brit in the FBI Series

Coauthored with Catherine Coulter

The Final Cut
The Lost Key
The End Game
The Devil's Triangle
The Sixth Day
The Last Second

LAST SEEN

J.T. ELLISON

 **THOMAS & MERCER**

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, organizations, places, events, and incidents are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Otherwise, any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

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First edition



For Jameson

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PART ONE

We can easily forgive a child who is afraid of the dark;
the real tragedy of life is when men are afraid of the
light.

—Author Unknown

PROLOGUE

I have never run so fast before.

The woods are thick and impenetrable to the eye, and I stumble through, desperate for a hint of light. Trees reach out with long branches to impede my path. Rocks shift and make me skid. Bushes appear from nowhere, sharp things scratching me open. More than once, my ankle turns, sending searing pain through my body. But I cannot stop. If I stop, I will be dead. Maybe here, under the sky and moon. Maybe there, in the vast darkness.

I have to get away. This is my only chance.

I'm panting, but I must be quiet, breathe through my nose, and pray he can't hear me crashing through the trees. I have a head start, only just, but his footsteps come anyway, their rhythm a corrupt heartbeat. I veer off to the right, then to the left, following no discernible path, trying to throw him off. He is hunting me, I know he is, back there with that look on his face—the twist of his lips, the shine in his dark eyes, the perverse joy in being the cause of my fear.

The trees open into a meadow, and now I can pour on the speed, but my lungs are about to burst. I trip, fall, rolling. Scramble back up. My palms sting; wetness and gravel. I can smell the blood, and other, darker things.

In the deep of night, without much moonglow, the field is not easy to traverse. I stumble again, and again, skin knees, shins, shoulders, but there is darkness at the end of the meadow. A cleaner view. Not light, but infinity. The cliff is ahead. If I can make the cliff . . . then what?

A choice.

I check the bandage wrapped around my chest. It is warm and wet. Blood still seeps from the deep cut. He likes to watch me bleed. Can he follow my path by the scent alone? Am I simply a wounded

deer, dragging itself to its inexorable end? He will find me. He will take me back to that hell . . . Panic flows through me anew, and I start off again but can feel the weakness in my legs. My lungs hurt; my body is fighting me. It was not meant to run this far, this fast. But I stay upright, push on, because not to is worse. A fate worse than death, isn't that what they say? If he catches me . . . I don't want to think about that. I don't know how long he's had me captive. Weeks, certainly. Perhaps months? The gentle swell of my belly should tell time better than any watch, but without a calendar, without scans and blood tests, there's no way to know for sure. Long enough to mark me, inside and out. Too long.

The darkness expands, and I realize I'm closing in on the cliffside.

To my left, round twin lights appear, bobbing in the darkness. A car. A car is coming. That means there is a road. There is another escape. I turn and run toward freedom, forgetting all the pains, all the fatigue. There is nothing in me now but hope. A car means a road means a town means help.

The hand on my arm appears from nowhere, yanking me to a halt, almost pulling my shoulder from the socket.

"Where do you think you're going?" he asks, dark amusement in his tone. He isn't even out of breath. As if he's flown here on dark wings, like the demon he is.

Hope vanishes with his closed fist against my jaw. Pain explodes, and I fall to the ground. I try to cry out, but nothing comes. My mouth won't work. Won't open. He covers me with his body, his hand tight against my throat. His weight, his horrible weight, pushing me down to the dirt, hiding me in the long grass.

The car whizzes by, and with it, my last chance.

The woods are silent and hungry, waiting, listening. There is nothing now except the panting of my breath and the singing joy of his black heart. I can hear it pounding above my ear. That, and other things. Arousal, to start. As if he's enjoying this. Of course he is. He's won.

He pulls me to my feet and starts the long, slow march back. I don't help, make him drag me. The pain in my face makes tears flow

down my cheeks. I think my jaw is broken and I know my tongue is cut; I'm gurgling blood. I spit and dribble and stay limp until he jerks me upright and in a low, menacing voice explains to me in detail exactly what he's going to do if I don't cooperate. By the third sentence of description, I've found my feet and stiffened my spine.

It's not about what he'll do to me. It's what he'll do to them.