

A MICHAEL BENNETT
PSYCHOLOGICAL THRILLER



OBSSESSED

JAMES
PATTERSON

AND JAMES O. BORN

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A Michael Bennett
Psychological Thriller

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LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY

Chapter 1

THE NYPD BOAT lurched and I almost slipped on the deck.

The waves made a monotonous slapping sound against the boat's hull, like an uneven drumbeat, as we cut through the choppy water. I sucked in a deep breath and could practically taste the Hudson River. The toxic odors of rotting fish and garbage didn't do anything to help the nausea I felt. I prayed it would pass.

One of the officers assigned to the boat tapped me on the shoulder. He grinned and offered me a piece of beef jerky.

"Very funny, asshole," Detective Terri Hernandez said as she snatched the jerky from the smirking cop and gave him a shove. "We're here to work. There's a woman's body out there." She turned to me. "You okay, Mike?"

"Never better. Fresh air, the sea. Who could ask for more?"

She smiled and said, "That's called karma for all the pranks you've played."

Terri was trying to distract me. That's why I like working with her. I was on edge, terrified that I'd recognize the body we were on our way to recover.

Suzanne Morton, a friend of my oldest daughter, Juliana, had gone missing three weeks ago. The last place anyone saw her was at a prestigious acting class in SoHo. Suzanne and my daughter had been in a few classes together in the past. The NYU sophomore kept a busy schedule but never missed an acting class. She had been a good influence around my house, encouraging my younger daughters to pursue their passions.

I'd spent hours with Suzanne's parents. I had first met them six months ago when we attended a short play both the girls were in. Since Suzanne's disappearance, they'd asked me over and over again what the NYPD was doing to find their daughter. I understood. If your child is missing, you want the whole world to stop and go look for them.

As a parent of ten kids, I always seem to have something to worry about. At least none of them was missing.

I didn't need to use my imagination to worry about what might have happened to Suzanne. I'd seen enough as a homicide detective. It felt like a knife in my abdomen every time I pictured the young woman, her light-brown hair framing a beautiful face that had deep dimples when she smiled.

I felt a change in the engine just as the pilot looked over her shoulder. She yelled in my direction, "Wind chop is really bad today! I'll get as close as I can."

I looked out over the whitecaps and spotted a figure floating in the water. A second boat, a Zodiac inflatable-hull outboard, discharged a diver. Recovery takes a lot of resources.

We idled alongside the body. Now that we were closer, I could see more clearly that the body was a woman, floating facedown in the water, with waves of long hair fanning out around her head. She was wearing a sparkly black cocktail dress that had attracted sea life. A fish nibbled at something in her hair.

Terri stepped behind me. "Is it her?"

Salt spray stung my face as I watched the grim procedure to recover the body. I shrugged. "Can't tell yet." I appreciated Terry's reassuring hand on my shoulder.

The female crime-scene tech on our boat pulled the winch line so the diver could attach it to the recovery basket. The wire basket was over six

feet long, with sides tall enough to keep a person firmly inside. I was relieved to see the care they used. They didn't know about my possible connection to the victim. They were just professionals.

Against all sound judgment, I stepped closer for a better look.

The other crime-scene tech, a doughy guy in his mid-thirties, leaned over the edge of the boat. He'd been the first victim of the beef jerky prank. All it had taken was a quick whiff of the smelly, dried meat, and the tech had vomited over the side of the boat. But now he showed great concentration and focus, leaning so far out of the boat his face almost touched the water.

I heard a helicopter in the distance. When I looked up, I noticed it was a news helicopter. I hoped to God they didn't try to get too close and film the body coming onto the boat. I couldn't imagine a family ever seeing that on TV, but reporters continue to amaze me.

I heard one of the crime-scene techs say they were bringing the body on board. I took a deep breath and steadied myself.