



THINGS
WE DO
IN THE
DARK

A NOVEL

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AUTHOR OF *LITTLE SECRETS*

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WE DO
IN THE
DARK

JENNIFER HILLIER



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For Mox

*you are my sunshine
and the air that I breathe
and the reason for everything*

PART ONE

She can kill with a smile, she can wound with her eyes

—BILLY JOEL

CHAPTER ONE

There's a time and a place for erect nipples, but the back of a Seattle police car definitely isn't it.

Paris Peralta didn't think to grab a sweater before they arrested her, so she's only wearing a bloodstained tank top. It is July, after all. But the air-conditioning is on high, and she feels cold and exposed. With her wrists cuffed, all she can do is clasp her hands together and hold her forearms up to cover her breasts. It looks like she's praying.

She's not praying. It's much too late for that.

Her head throbs underneath the butterfly bandage one of the EMTs stuck on before they put her in the cop car. She must have slammed it into the rim of the bathtub sometime last night, but she doesn't remember tripping or falling. All she remembers is her husband, lying in a bathtub filled with blood, and the screaming that woke her up this morning.

The blond-ponytailed detective behind the wheel glances at Paris again in the rearview mirror. Ever since Jimmy signed a streaming deal with new Netflix competitor Quan six months ago, people have been staring at her a lot. Paris hates it. When she and Jimmy got married, she expected to live a quiet life with the retired actor-comedian. That's the deal they made; that's the marriage she signed up for. But then Jimmy changed his mind and *un*-retired, and it was about the worst thing he could have done to her.

And now he's dead.

The detective has been keeping an eye on her in the back seat the entire time, her eyes shifting from the road to the mirror every few minutes. Paris can already tell the woman thinks she did it. Okay, fine, so it looked bad. There was so much blood, and when the detective arrived on the scene, there were

already three officers in the bedroom pointing their guns straight at Paris through the bathroom doorway. Soon there were four pairs of eyes staring at her as if she'd done something terrible. Nobody seemed to be blinking or breathing, including her.

"Mrs. Peralta, please put the weapon down," the detective had said. Her voice was calm and direct as she unholstered her pistol. "And then come out of the bathroom slowly with your hands up."

But I don't have a weapon, Paris thought. It was the second time someone had told her to do that, and just like before, it didn't make sense. *What weapon?*

Then the detective's eyes flickered downward. Paris followed her glance and was shocked to discover that she was still holding Jimmy's straight razor. And not just holding it, but *clutching* it in her right hand, her fingers wrapped tightly around the handle, her knuckles white. She lifted it up, staring at it in wonder as she turned it over in her hand. The police officers didn't like that, and the detective repeated her demand again in a tone louder and more commanding than before.

The whole thing was so absurd. Everybody was overreacting. Paris wasn't holding a weapon. It was just a shaving tool, one of several straight razors that Jimmy owned, because her husband was an old-school guy who liked straight shaves and cassette tapes and landlines. He wasn't even allowed to use his straight razors anymore. The worsening tremor in his hand had rendered them unsafe.

So why the hell was Paris still holding the ebony-handled razor he'd bought in Germany decades ago?

Everything happened in slow-motion. As the detective continued to speak, Paris once again took in the blood spattered across the white marble tile floor, diluted pink from mixing with the bathwater. It was Jimmy's blood, and she knew that if she turned around, she would see her husband behind her, submerged in the deep soaker bathtub where he'd bled out the night before.

Paris did not turn around. But she did manage to catch a glimpse of herself in the mirror above the sink, where she saw a woman who looked just like her wearing a tank top splotted with blood. Her hair was tangled and her eyes were wild, the side of her face covered in blood that had oozed from a gash over her right eyebrow. In her hand, Jimmy's old straight razor did look like a weapon.

A *murder* weapon.

“Mrs. Peralta, drop the razor,” the detective commanded again.

Paris finally dropped it. The steel blade landed on the tile with a dull clang, and the uniformed officers moved in on her in a swarm. One of them slapped the cuffs on her, and the detective informed her of her rights. As they led her out of the bedroom and down the stairs, Paris wondered how she would possibly explain this.

Years ago, the last time this happened, she didn’t have to explain it at all.

“I’m sorry, but would you mind turning down the air-conditioning?” Paris’s nipples are pressing hard against her forearms like ball bearings. Though she’d lived in Seattle for almost twenty years now, the Canadian in her still can’t break the habit of apologizing before asking for something. “I’m sorry, it’s just really cold back here.”

The officer in the passenger seat pushes a button on the dashboard repeatedly until the cold air eases up.

“Thank you,” she says.

The officer turns around. “Anything else we can do for you?” he asks. “Need a mint? Want to stop and grab a coffee?”

He’s not asking real questions, so she doesn’t respond.

On some level Paris understands that she’s in shock and that the full extent of the situation hasn’t hit her yet. At least her self-preservation instincts have kicked in—she knows she’s been arrested, she knows she’s going to be booked, and she knows she needs to keep her mouth shut and call a lawyer at the first opportunity. But still, it feels like she’s watching all this happen from the *outside*, as if she’s in a movie where someone who looks like her is about to be charged with murder.

This feeling of *disassociation*—a word she learned as a kid—is something that happens to her whenever she’s in situations of extreme stress. Disassociation was her mind’s way of protecting her from the traumas that were happening to her body. While this isn’t what’s happening now, the feeling of separation between her brain and physical form tends to happen whenever she feels vulnerable and unsafe.

Right now, the life she knows—the life she’s built—is being threatened.

Paris can’t float away, though. She needs to stay present if she’s going to make it through this, so she focuses on her breathing. As she tells her yoga students, whatever is happening, you can always come back to your breath.

Constricting her throat just a little, she takes a slow, deep inhale, holds it, then exhales. It makes a slight hissing sound, as if she's trying to fog up the car window, and the detective's eyes dart toward her in the rearview mirror once again.

After a few ocean breaths—*ujjayi* breaths—Paris is more clearheaded, more *here*, and she tries to process how the hell she ended up in the back of a cop car, on her way to jail. She watches enough TV to know that the police always assume it's the spouse. Of course, it hadn't helped one bit that Zoe, Jimmy's assistant, was the one pointing the finger and screaming herself hoarse. *She murdered him she murdered him oh my God she's a murderer!*

They think she killed Jimmy.

And now the rest of the world will, too, because that's how it looks when you're led out of your home in handcuffs with blood on your clothes as news of your celebrity husband's death ripples through the crowd of onlookers snapping photos and recording videos of your arrest. The irony is, the crowd was already conveniently in place outside the house well before Zoe called the cops. Paris and Jimmy live on Queen Anne Hill, right across the street from Kerry Park, which boasts the best views of Seattle. It's a popular spot for both locals and tourists to take photos of the city skyline and Mount Rainier, and the crowd today was like any other, except the cameras were pointing toward the house instead of the skyline. And just like there hadn't been time to put on another shirt, there had been no opportunity to put on different shoes. Paris heard someone yell, "Nice slippers!" as soon as she stepped outside, but it didn't sound like a compliment.

The neighbors on the street were all outside, too. Bob and Elaine from next door were standing at the end of their driveway, their faces filled with shock and horror at the sight of her. Since they didn't call out or offer to help in any way, they must have already heard what happened. They must already think Paris is guilty.

They're supposed to be her friends.

She can imagine the headlines already. JIMMY PERALTA, THE PRINCE OF POUGHKEEPSIE, FOUND DEAD AT 68. Though Jimmy's highly rated sitcom had ended its ten-year run more than two decades earlier, he would forever be known for his starring role as the son of a bakery owner in *The Prince of Poughkeepsie*, which won over a dozen Emmys and propelled Jimmy into movie stardom until he retired seven years ago. Paris doesn't have to be a

publicist to predict that the news of her husband's death will be even bigger than the headline-making multimillion-dollar deal Jimmy signed with Quan when he decided to make his comeback. Even Paris would think this was a juicy story if it wasn't happening to her.

She continues to focus on her breathing, but her mind refuses to settle. None of this feels right. While she had no illusions that she and Jimmy would grow old together, she thought they had more time. In the two years they'd been married, they'd established an easy routine. Paris worked at the yoga studio six days a week, and Jimmy always had things going on. But Sundays were their day together. They should be having a lazy brunch right now at the nearby diner, where the owner always saved them a table by the window. Pancakes and bacon for Jimmy, waffles with strawberries for Paris. Afterward, they might head into Fremont for the farmers' market or take a drive to Snohomish to do some antiques hunting. More often than not, though, they'd head home, where Jimmy would putter in the garden, trimming this and weeding that, while she cracked open a paperback and sat by the pool.

But this is not a normal Sunday. This is a fucking nightmare. Paris should have known it would end like this, because there's no such thing as happily ever after when you run away from one life to start a whole new one.

Karma has come for her.

A feather from her ridiculous slippers tickles the top of her foot. When she received them for her birthday last month—not her real birthday, but the one that's listed on her ID—they were funny and cute. Her instructors at the studio had all chipped in to buy her the pair of seriously expensive Italian designer slides made out of pink ostrich feathers. They were supposed to stay at the studio so she'd have something to walk around in between classes, but she couldn't resist bringing them home to show Jimmy. She knew he would laugh, and he did.

The slippers aren't funny now. All they'll do is play into the narrative the media keeps trying to create, which is that Paris is a rich, self-entitled asshole. She managed to fly under the radar for nineteen years after she escaped Toronto, only to have it all undone when Jimmy's trusty assistant Zoe included their wedding photo with the press release about the streaming deal. Zoe couldn't understand why Paris was so upset, but until that day, most people hadn't even known that Jimmy Peralta had gotten married again. Paris had

been living in blissful anonymity with her retired husband, and then it all went to hell.

As Zoe would say, the optics are terrible. Paris is Jimmy's fifth wife, and she's almost thirty years younger than he is. While the age difference was never a problem for Jimmy—why would it be?—it makes Paris look like a gold-digging bitch who was just waiting for her husband to die.

And now he's dead.

CHAPTER TWO

The desk clerk at the King County jail asks for her phone, but Paris doesn't have it with her. As far as she remembers, it's still on the nightstand in her bedroom, in the house that's now a crime scene.

"All personal items need to be bagged and placed in the bin," the clerk informs her. Like the detective that brought her here, he hasn't stopped staring since she was brought in. "That includes your jewelry."

All Paris has is her wedding ring. Jimmy had offered to buy her an engagement ring, too, but she declined, insisting she would never wear it while teaching yoga anyway. In the end, he talked her into an eternity band crafted with fifteen fancy pink oval-shaped diamonds. The retail cost was an astounding \$250,000, but the jeweler had offered Jimmy a discount if they were willing to have the ring photographed and publicized. Paris declined that, too.

"I don't want the publicity," she told Jimmy. "I'm really okay with a simple gold band."

"Not a fucking chance." Jimmy had a short conversation with the jeweler and slapped down his black Amex. Because he was Jimmy Peralta, he got the discount anyway.

"Paris Peralta." The desk clerk says her name with a smirk as he types on his keyboard, drawing out the syllables. *Paaarrrissss Peraaaaalta*. "My wife's gonna shit herself when I tell her who I booked today. She was a big fan of *The Prince of Poughkeepsie*. Never liked the show myself. I always thought Jimmy Peralta was an ass."

"Have some respect, Officer." The detective is standing beside her, elbow to elbow, as if she thinks there's a chance Paris might bolt. She tosses her head,

and the tip of her ponytail flicks Paris's bare arm. "The man is dead."

Paris pulls off her wedding ring and passes it through the window. Beside her, she hears the detective mutter under her breath, "Jesus, it's pink." The desk clerk examines the ring closely before sealing it in a small plastic bag. He then drops it into the plastic bin, where it lands with an audible *smack*.

Inwardly, she winces. *The value of that ring*, Paris thinks, *is probably triple what you earned last year*. Outwardly, she maintains her composure. She's not going to give anyone a story to sell to the tabloids. Instead, she makes eye contact with him through the smudged plexiglass window and stares him down. As she predicts, he's a weasel, and his gaze drops back to his computer.

"Sign this." He shoves her inventory list through the window. There's only one item on it. *Ring, diamond, pink*. Paris scrawls her signature.

Another officer comes out from behind the desk and waits expectantly. The detective turns to Paris. She probably did introduce herself at the time of the arrest, but her name eludes Paris now, assuming she even heard it in the first place.

"We'll need your clothes," the detective says. "Slippers, too. They'll give you something else to put on. And then I'll come and talk to you, okay?"

"I'd like to call my lawyer," Paris says.

The detective isn't surprised, but she does seem disappointed. "You can do that after you're processed."

A buzzer sounds, and Paris is led through a set of doors and into a small, brightly lit room. She's directed to take her clothes off in the corner behind a blue curtain. She undresses quickly, removing everything but her underwear, and puts on the sweatshirt, sweatpants, socks, and rubber slides they've given her. It's a relief to get the bloodstained clothes off and change into footwear that doesn't resemble a cat toy. Everything is stamped with the letters *DOC*.

She's fingerprinted and photographed. Her hair is a matted mess, but it's not like she can borrow a hairbrush. She looks straight at the camera and lifts her chin. Jimmy once said that it's near impossible to not look like a criminal in a mugshot. He would know. He was arrested twice for driving under the influence and once for assault after shoving a heckler in Las Vegas after a show. In all three mugshots, he looked guilty as hell.

The processing done, she's led to an elevator for a quick ride down one floor. The young officer escorting her shoots furtive glances in her direction from time to time, but he doesn't say a word until they get to the holding cell.

In a voice that squeaks (followed by a quick throat clear), he directs her to go inside. As soon as she steps in, the bars close and lock with a clang.

And just like that, Paris is in jail.

It's both better and worse than she always imagined, and she has imagined it many times. It's bigger than she expected, and there's only one other person in here, a woman who's currently passed out on the opposite side of the cell. One bare leg hangs off the edge of the bench, and the soles of her bare feet are filthy. Her tight neon-yellow dress is covered in stains from an indeterminate substance, but at least she wasn't forced to change her clothes. Whatever she's being held for, it's not murder.

Though the cell appears clean, the harsh fluorescent lights show smears from whatever was recently mopped up. Based on the lingering odors, it was both urine and vomit. The walls look sticky and are covered in a dingy shade of beige paint the color of weak tea, and there's a camera mounted in one corner of the ceiling.

At the back of the cell, right beside the telephone anchored to the wall, is a plastic-covered sign that lists the phone numbers of three different bail bond companies. With any luck, she won't need them. She picks up the handset and punches in one of the few phone numbers she has memorized. *Pick up, pick up, pick up ...*

Voice mail. *Shit.* She hears her own voice encouraging her to leave a message.

"Henry, it's Paris," she says quietly. "I'm going to try your cell. I'm in trouble."

She hangs up, waits for the dial tone, and calls the second number she knows by heart. This, too, goes to voice mail. A few feet away, her cellmate sits up, her greasy hair falling around her oily face. She regards Paris with bleary, mascara-smearred raccoon eyes.

"I know you." Her words are thick and slurred. Even from a few feet away, Paris can smell her, an aroma like rotting food in a whiskey distillery. "I seen you before. You're, like, a famous person."

Paris pretends not to hear her.

"You're that chick who married that old guy." The woman blinks, trying to focus. When Paris doesn't respond, she says, "Oh, okay, I get it, you're a fucking princess, too good to talk to me. Well, fuck you, princess." She lies back down. Ten seconds later, her face is slack and her mouth falls open.

There's a schoolhouse clock on the wall outside the cell, and Paris waits exactly four and a half minutes before picking up the phone again. This time, someone answers immediately.

"Ocean Breath Yoga."

"Henry." Relief floods through Paris at the sound of her business partner's voice. "Thank God."

"Holy shit, P, are you okay?" Henry's voice is filled with concern. "I just heard about Jimmy. Oh, honey, I'm so sorry. I can't believe it—"

"Henry, they've arrested me." She can't believe she's saying the words. "I'm in a holding cell at the King County jail."

"I saw the arrest. It's such bullshit—"

"You saw? It's on the news?"

"On the *news*? Honey, it's on TikTok." She hears some background noise and then hears a door shut, which means Henry has taken the cordless phone into the office. "One of the tourists at the park filmed your arrest and uploaded it. It's currently the number one trending video."

Of course this isn't surprising, but hearing Henry say it makes it all the more real. Paris swallows down the panic and reminds herself that there will be plenty of time to fall apart later.

"Henry, listen," she says. "I need you to call Elsie Dixon for me."

"Jimmy's friend? The lawyer who sings showtunes at all your parties?"

"That's the one. I don't have my phone, so I don't have her number."

"I'll google her law office."

"She won't be in, it's Sunday. But if you look in the desk, there might be a business card with her cell. Ask her to come down to the jail right away, okay?"

"I don't see a card." She can hear Henry rifling through the drawers. "Don't worry, I'll figure something out. I thought she was in litigation?"

"She started her career as a public defender," Paris says. "And she's the only lawyer I know."

"God, P...," Henry says, sounding genuinely stunned. "I can't believe you're in jail. Is it like in the movies?"

She looks around. "More or less. But bleaker."

"Can I bring you anything? A pillow? A book? A shank?"

He's trying to make her laugh, but the best she can manage is a snort. "I love you. Just track Elsie down, okay? And maybe you could let the instructors

know what's going on."

"P, they're saying..." A pause. "They're saying you killed Jimmy. I know that's not possible, because I know *you*. You're not a murderer."

"I appreciate that," Paris says, and after saying goodbye, they hang up.

Henry has always been a supportive friend, and he's loyal to the core. But he doesn't know her, not really.

Nobody does.