

#1 *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR

NORA ROBERTS

WRITING AS

J.D.
ROBB

FIRST
TIME IN
PRINT!

PURITY
IN DEATH

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Purity in Death

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We bow our heads before Thee, and we laud
And magnify thy name Almighty God!
But man is thy most awful instrument
In working out a pure intent.

—William Woodsworth

In friendship false, implacable in hate,
Resolv'd to ruin or to rule the state.

—John Dryden

Prologue

The heat was murder. July flexed her sweaty muscles, eyed the goal, and drop-kicked New York into the sweltering steambath of summer. Some managed to escape, fleeing to their shore homes where they could sip cold drinks and bask in ocean breezes while they did their business via telelink. Some loaded up on supplies and hunkered down inside their air-cooled homes like tribes under siege.

But most just had to live through it.

With humatures into the triple digits, and no end in sight, moods turned surly, deodorants failed, and petty annoyances elbowed even the mildest of souls toward violence.

Emergency medical centers were jammed with the wounded soldiers of summer, 2059. Many who, under normal conditions, wouldn't so much as jaywalk saw the inside of police stations and holding tanks, forced to call lawyers to explain why they had attempted to throttle a coworker, or shove a complete stranger under the wheels of a Rapid Cab.

Usually, once cooled off, they didn't know why but sat or stood, blank-faced and baffled, like someone coming out of a trance.

But Louie K. Cogburn knew just what he was doing, why he did it, and how he intended to keep right on doing it. He was a small-time illegals dealer who primarily hawked Zoner and Jazz. To increase his profit margin, Louie cut the Zoner with dried grass scored from city parks, and the Jazz with baking powder he bought in warehouse-sized bins. His target clientele were middle-class kids between the ages of ten and twelve in the three school districts closest to his Lower East Side apartment.

This cut down on travel time and expense.

He preferred straight middle-class as the poor generally had their own suppliers within the family ranks, and the rich copped to the grass and baking powder too quickly. The target age group fit Louie's brand of logic. He liked to say if you hooked 'em young, you had a client for life.

So far this credo hadn't proved out for him as Louie had yet to maintain a business relationship with a client through high school graduation.

Still, Louie took his business seriously. Every evening when his potential clients were doing their homework, he did his. He was proud of his bookkeeping, and would certainly have earned more per annum as a number cruncher for any midlevel firm than he did dealing. But he was a man who felt real men worked for themselves.

Just lately if there'd been a wash of dissatisfaction, a touch of irritability, a jagged edge of despair after he spent an hour running his business programs on his third-hand desktop, he put it off to the heat.

And the headache. The vicious bastard of a headache no dose of his own products could ease.

He lost three days of work because the pain had become the focus of his world. He holed up in his studio flop, stewing in the heat, blasting his music to cover up the raging storm in his head.

Somebody was going to pay for it, that's all he knew. Somebody.

Goddamn lazy-assed super hadn't fixed the climate control. He thought this, with growing anger while his beady, reddened eyes scanned numbers. He sat in his underwear, by the single open window of his one-room apartment. No breeze came through it, but the street noise was horrendous. Shouts, horns, squealing tires on pavement.

He turned up the trash rock he played out of his ancient entertainment unit to drown out the noise. To beat at the pain.

Blood trickled out of his nose, but he didn't notice.

Louie K. rubbed a lukewarm bottle of home-brew over his forehead. He wished he had a blaster. If he had a goddamn blaster he'd lean out the goddamn window and take out a goddamn city block.

His most violent act to date had been to kick a delinquent client off his airboard, but the image of death and destruction fueled him now as he sweated over his books and madness bloomed in his brain like black roses.

His face was pale as wax, rivulets of sweat pouring down from his matted brown hair, streaming down his narrow cheeks. His ears rang and what felt like an ocean of grease swayed in his belly. Heat was making him sick, he thought. He got sick, he lost money. Ought to take it out of the super's hide. Ought to.

His hands trembled as he stared at the screen. Stared at the screen. Couldn't take his eyes from the screen.

He had an image of himself going to the window, climbing out on the ledge, beating his fists at that hot wall of air, at the noise, at the people below. A blaster in his hands, doling out death and destruction as he screamed at them. Screamed and screamed as he leaped.

He'd land on his feet, and then . . .

The pounding on his door had him spinning around. With his teeth bared he climbed back in the window.

"Louie K., you asshole! Turn that fucking music down in there!"

"Go to hell," he muttered as he hefted the ball bat he often took to recreation areas to insinuate himself with potential clients. "Go to hell, go to hell. Let's all go to hell."

"You hear me? Goddamn it!"

“Yeah, I hear you.” There were spikes, big iron spikes drilling into his brain. He had to get them out. On a thin scream, he dropped the bat to tear at his own hair. But the pounding wouldn’t stop.

“Suze is calling the cops. You hear me, Louie? You don’t turn that shit down Suze is calling the cops.” Each word was punctuated with a fist against the door.

With the music, the pounding, the shouts, the spikes all hammering in his head, the sweat drowning him, Louie picked up the bat again.

He opened the door, and started swinging.

Chapter 1

Lieutenant Eve Dallas loitered at her desk. She was stalling, and she wasn't proud of it. The idea of changing into a fancy dress, driving uptown to meet her husband and a group of strangers for a business dinner thinly disguised as a social gathering had all the appeal of climbing in the nearest recycler and turning on Shred.

Right now Cop Central was very appealing.

She'd caught and closed a case that afternoon, so there was paperwork. It wasn't *all* stalling. But as the bevy of witnesses had all agreed that the guy who'd taken a header off a six-story people glide had been the one who'd started the pushy-shovey match with the two tourists from Toledo, it wasn't much of a time sucker.

For the past several days, every case she'd caught had been a variation on the same theme. Domestics where spouses had battled to the death, street brawls turned lethal, even a deadly combat at a corner glide-cart over ice cones.

Heat made people stupid and mean, she thought, and the combination spilled blood.

She was feeling a little mean herself at the idea of dressing up and spending several hours in some snooty restaurant making small talk with people she didn't know.

That's what you got, she thought in disgust, when you marry a guy who had enough money to buy a couple of continents.

Roarke actually liked evenings like this. The fact that he did never failed to baffle her. He was every bit at home in a five-star restaurant—one he

likely owned anyway—nibbling on caviar as he was sitting at home chowing down on a burger.

And she supposed as their marriage was approaching its second year, she'd better stop crabbing about it. Resigned, she pushed back from the desk.

"You're still here." Her aide, Peabody, stopped in the doorway of her office. "I thought you had some fancy dinner deal uptown."

"I got time." A glance at her wrist unit brought on a little tug of guilt. Okay, she was going to be late. But not very. "I just finished up on the glide diver."

Peabody, whose summer blues defied all natural order and managed to stay crisp in the wilting heat, kept her dark eyes sober. "You wouldn't be stalling, would you, Lieutenant?"

"One of the residents of our city, who I am sworn to serve and protect, ended up squished like a bug on Fifth Avenue. I think he deserves an extra thirty minutes of my time."

"It must be really rough, forced to put on a beautiful dress, stick some diamonds or whatever all over you and choke down champagne and lobster croquettes beside the most beautiful man ever born, on or off planet. I don't know how you get through the day with that weight on your shoulders, Dallas."

"Shut up."

"And here I am, free to squeeze into the local pizza place with McNab where we will split the pie and the check." Peabody shook her head slowly. The dark bowl of hair under her cap swayed in concert. "I can't tell you how guilty I feel knowing that."

"You looking for trouble, Peabody?"

“No, sir.” Peabody did her best to look pious. “Just offering my support and sympathy at this difficult time.”

“Kiss ass.” Torn between annoyance and amusement, Eve started to shove by. Her desk ’link beeped.

“Shall I get that for you, sir, and tell them you’ve gone for the day?”

“Didn’t I tell you to shut up?” Eve turned back to the desk, took the transmission. “Homicide. Dallas.”

“Sir. Lieutenant.”

She recognized Officer Troy Trueheart’s face as it popped on-screen, though she’d never seen its young, All-American features so strained. “Trueheart.”

“Lieutenant,” he repeated after an audible swallow. “I have an incident. In response to . . . oh gosh, I killed him.”

“Officer.” She pulled his location on-screen as she spoke. “Are you on duty?”

“No, sir. Yes, sir. I don’t know, exactly.”

“Pull yourself together, Trueheart.” She slapped out the order, watched his head jerk as if he’d felt it physically. “Report.”

“Sir. I had just clocked off shift and was on my way home on foot when a female civilian shouted for assistance from a window. I responded. On the fourth floor of the building in question an individual armed with a bat was assaulting the female. Another individual, male, was unconscious or dead in the hallway, bleeding from the head. I entered the apartment where the assault was taking place, and . . . Lieutenant, I tried to stop him. He was killing her. He turned on me, ignored all warnings and orders to desist. I managed to draw my weapon, to stun. I swear I intended to stun, but he’s dead.”

“Trueheart, look at me. Listen to me. Secure the building, call in the incident through Dispatch and inform them that you’ve reported to me and I’m on my way. I’ll call for medical assistance. You hold the scene, Trueheart. Hold it by the book. Do you understand?”

“Yes, sir. I should’ve called Dispatch first. I should’ve—”

“You stand, Trueheart. I’m on the way. Peabody,” Eve commanded as she strode out the door.

“Yes, sir. I’m with you.”

There were two black-and-whites, nose-to-nose, and a medi-van humped between them at the curb when Eve pulled up. The neighborhood was the type where people scattered rather than gathered when cops showed up, and as a result there was no more than a smattering of gawkers on the sidewalk who had to be told to stay back.

The two uniforms who flanked the entrance eyed her, then exchanged a look. She was brass, and the one who could well put one of their own rank’s balls in the blender.

She could feel the chill as she approached.

“Cop shouldn’t get hassled by cops for doing the job,” one of them muttered.

Eve paused in midstride and stared him down.

He saw rank in the form of a long, leanly built woman with eyes of gilded brown that were as flat and expressionless as a snake’s as they met his. Her hair, short and choppy, was nearly the same color and framed a narrow face offset by a wide mouth that was now firmed into one thin line. There was a shallow dent in a chin that looked like it could hold its own against a fist.

Under her stare he felt himself shrink.

“Cop shouldn’t slap at a cop for doing hers,” she said coldly. “You got a problem with me, Officer, wait until I do that job. Then mouth off.”

She moved into the shoe box lobby, punched a finger on the Up button of the single elevator. She was already steaming, but it had little to do with the oppressive heat. “What is it with some uniforms that they want to bite your throat when you’re rank?”

“It’s just nerves, Dallas,” Peabody replied as they stepped onto the elevator. “Most of the uniforms out of Central know Trueheart, and you gotta like him. A uniform terminates on his own like this, Testing’s going to be brutal.”

“Testing’s brutal anyway. The best we can do for him is to keep this clean and ordered. He’s already screwed up by tagging me before he called it in.”

“Is he going to take heat for that? You’re the one who pulled him out of the sidewalk scooper detail and into Central last winter. Internal ought to understand—”

“IAB isn’t big on understanding. So let’s hope it doesn’t go there.” She stepped off the elevator. Studied the scene.

He’d been smart enough, cop enough, she noted with some relief, not to disturb the bodies. Two men lay sprawled in the corridor, one of them facedown in a pool of congealing blood.

The other was faceup, staring with some surprise at the ceiling. Through an open doorway beside the bodies she could hear the sounds of weeping and groaning.

The door across was also open. She noted several fresh holes and dents in the hallway walls, splinters of wallboard, splatters of blood. And what had once been a baseball bat was now a broken club, covered with blood and brain matter.