

FROM THE WINNER OF
THE NED KELLY AWARD FOR BEST FICTION

DAVE
WARNER

OVER MY
DEAD BODY

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FREMANTLE PRESS

SWITZERLAND 1891

He had begun to accept the background noise of the falls was no natural phenomenon but rather the thundering tears of gods. His own tears he had stalled, as ridiculous hope sprang in his breast that survival was not impossible, even from that terrific height. Long after the sun had collapsed he had insisted they continue the search downstream by lantern-light. It was too dark for a boat to be used with safety, though he would have risked it if his eyesight had been keen enough. They confined themselves to the banks but were not rewarded with anything but chilled bones. When the others had finally left for the comfort of the inn, he had refused their entreaties to join them, paying the boy to stay with him just in case, for if he was able to manage some rescue, the boy would have to ride for help. Around midnight, the innkeeper returned on horseback with some bread, cheese and a small flask of brandy. This sustained him for a few more hours but he had less glow about him than the lanterns, no appetite, his eating purely mechanical. He'd allowed the lad an hour of rest and, finally alone, had sobbed with a volume of tears he would not have thought his body capable of producing. As soon as light had peeped above the mountains he roused the lad again.

The boy pulled evenly on the oars in a slow circle as instructed. They were able to use the rowboat for this more passive part of the gorge. His jacket felt damp, whether because of the giant shroud of mist or his own lacrimation he could not have said. The sun was too thin yet for warmth. At one point he fancied he heard the strains of a violin from somewhere beyond the towering cliffs, and again he fell prey to that lascivious strumpet, hope. Stupid dumb hope that it was his dear friend playing

a trick, pipe in mouth, testing him for the sake of it, another one of his endless experiments on the human personality.

And of course, I'd forgive him, he thought. So long as he were alive. But the scientist in him told him this was not possible. He plunged his hand into the water, freezing. A heart would stop beating instantly even if the impact –

'Over there!' he heard himself shout, and pointed so that the boy, who had little English, was given the direction. The boy guided the boat quickly. There was definitely something, a small dark shape in the water.

'To the left!' he yelled louder, gesticulating. He reached over the side of the boat and snared it, though his fingers felt petrified from the contact with the chill lake.

Now as he held the soggy item in his trembling hands he was at once weighed down with an iron melancholy.

There was no mistaking that deerstalker.

1. CATSKILLS NEW YORK 2000

WATSON

Icing on a giant wedding cake. White. As far as the eye could see. On the edge of the frozen lake, trees, their branches frosted, huddled like guests outside the church waiting to congratulate the bride and groom.

‘It’s absolutely beautiful.’ Her mom squeezed her dad’s arm. This was the highlight of her mom’s year, out of Flushing and traffic and away from a flightpath for two glorious weeks. Her dad switched off the engine and the heater died with it. You could feel the cold outside beating on the glass to get in.

‘Are we here?’ Earphones in, Simone yelled. She had been bopping away the whole trip. There was nothing more annoying than a twelve year old little sister, unless it was a twelve year old little sister singing Destiny’s Child songs out of tune. Georgette pulled out Simone’s earphones.

‘Stop shouting.’

Her mom chimed in. ‘I’ve told you, Simone. Don’t have the music up so loud. You’ll go deaf.’

‘It’s nowhere near as loud as a gun. Is it, Dad?’

‘Simone ...’

Their dad’s tone was a warning to desist but the cat was out of the bag. Their mom didn’t think guns had any place near families. She tolerated a gun in the hand of a sensible cop like their father but that was it.

‘You took her to the range?’

Simone had been pestering him relentlessly.

‘Only so she knew how a gun worked.’

Georgette found her sister’s gaze and shook her head: Did you have to?

It was the only time of the year her parents got a break together. Teachers and cops in New York City had no downtime on the job.

‘How many times?’ Her mom knew how to wind up the pressure.

‘Just the once.’

Which Georgette knew was a lie.

‘And you?’

Georgette found herself suddenly in her Mom’s crosshairs.

‘Of course not.’ Georgette preferred to read, science biographies especially. Madame Curie was her hero.

‘You made her wear earmuffs, right? At the range.’

‘Of course, sweetheart.’ Her dad said, ‘We can have lunch here.’

Simone thrust open the car door. The cold rushed in, smash-and-grab style.

‘Hey, girls, careful on that ice,’ her father cautioned. Simone was already ripping her skates from her bag and lashing them on.

Her mother opened her door and went to swing out. ‘Darn.’

Georgette saw the bright red spot of blood on the snow. Her father handed his wife a tissue to dab her nose.

‘When we get back, you see Bernie.’

‘It’s just the sudden cold. Georgette, where’s your sister?’

Like that idiot was her responsibility. Simone had vanished around a big heap of snow. But she didn’t want her mother to worry, so Georgette ran out, her father’s words at her heel.

‘Tell her to be careful.’

Georgette trudged around the big white hill. Simone was already below, a dark raisin rolling in a big circle.

‘Simone!’ Georgette shouted but her sister didn’t even look up. ‘Screw this,’ she muttered and slid on her backside down the icy slope to the edge of the frozen lake. She started across it angrily.

‘Didn’t you hear Dad?’

Now Simone seemed to notice her. She pulled out her earphones.

‘What’s your problem?’

‘Dad said to wait. It’s dangerous.’

‘You’re only two years older than me, stop acting like you’re the principal.’

Georgette strode towards her. ‘It would serve you right if you –’

There was no warning. Just a soft snap. Simone screamed.

But it wasn’t her that plunged through the ice.

Georgette understood, in that fraction of a second, the icy grasping

arms of the lake dragging her warm blood to its bosom, that before she could even finish this thought she would be d—

When he heard the scream, Harry Watson grabbed the rusted gaff hook from the roof of the car, the hook he had never used but kept just in case, and began running. He had chased car thieves down back alleys, he had raced for help when two of his colleagues had been shot in a bungled bodega robbery, but he had never run this fast. Simone was standing on the ice, wailing. He could see the tear in its surface from here. And no Georgette. Simone took a step towards the dark hole.

‘Stay there!’ He skidded down the slope. He knew he shouldn’t run, did anyway. He reached the spot and looked down. Nothing. He jammed the pole down. Nothing. As far as it could go. Nothing.

He got down on his knees and used it like a giant swizzle stick and felt it snag. He pulled it with all his strength, across and up. The blue Gore-Tex jacket became visible.

Below he saw fanning hair. He hauled higher, got an arm across Georgette’s chest and yanked her out, her body leaving the water’s gullet with an audible suck. He began dragging her backwards across the ice, turned and saw Helen on the bank.

‘The foil blanket, hurry!’

A quick glance. Simone sobbing but for once doing as she was told, staying put. Georgette’s face as blue as her jacket. Memory flash: as a young patrolman a few years back, boat smash in the East River. He’d dived in, pulled out two teenage girls, the second one, a child Georgette’s age, blue. Too late.

He’d learned CPR as a result. Drummed it in: unresponsive, check airways, clear mouth, feel abdomen for rise and fall. Did it now. Like touching a marble slab. Nothing. No more time, ripped open the jacket, two breaths, thirty compressions. Helen slid down with the foil blanket. Must be four minutes gone easy.

Nothing. Breathe, compress. Nothing. Breathe, compress ...

Nothing.

2. NEW YORK 2020

‘So, you were dead for probably twelve minutes?’

‘At least. More like fifteen.’

Georgette had been through this kind of interview many times. It was second nature to her but even so, here, in front of peers and students in the setting of the lecture hall, she felt unusually nervous.

‘Do you remember anything?’

‘The cold as I hit the water. My heart must have stopped instantly. Next thing I remember was my father’s face, surrounded by bright blue sky.’

Professor Anita Mirabella might have been a world-renowned neurologist but she was also a very skilled interviewer. She angled herself on her scalloped chair.

‘And tell us, what we all want to know ...’ A very deliberate pause. ‘... do you still talk to your sister?’

This brought hearty laughter from the audience. Two hundred and eighty was the capacity and through the curtain of lights, Georgette could see hardly a spare seat.

‘We are still friends.’

‘Did she feel guilty?’

‘My sister never feels guilty for anything but she did make a small concession: no more *Destiny’s Child*.’

This, Georgette was pleased to hear, brought a chuckle.

‘So she didn’t go into medicine or nursing then?’

‘No; something the world needs far more of ... acting.’

This time there was a communal guffaw. That would serve Simone right for not coming.

‘Some of our audience may have seen the article on you in the *Times* a

couple of weeks ago. You sometimes consult for the NYPD?’

Georgette was sure she blushed. She’d hoped the article, prompted by Mirabella working her media contacts, would have focused on her research but it wound up being nothing more than a human-interest story about a girl who once died, coming back to life and ultimately working alongside her cop father. It made her sound like one of those TV pathologists who solved crime.

‘Occasionally. If they need help on time of death or if there is some element of a body having been frozen. My dad has been a cop for thirty-eight years; it’s not as weird as it sounds.’

‘You work cases together?’

‘They tend to use me for Homicide and he’s not Homicide. He’s a lieutenant at the one-fourteen in Queens, so not so far.’

‘Is he here tonight?’

‘I believe so.’

‘Could Georgette’s father please stand?’

Harry would be lapping this up. The lights found him. There he was, off to the left about six rows up in his favorite blazer. The crowd applauded and Harry politely waved. Highly embarrassing but sweet too.

‘Thanks, Harry,’ said Mirabella and the lights swung back to the stage and her father was once more swallowed by black.

‘So the course of your life continues to be intimately related to death, your own included.’

‘Absolutely. I became fascinated with cryogenics and the possibility of life after what we tend to think of as death.’

‘Resurrection.’

More appreciative laughter for Mirabella, the in-house kind.

‘You could call it that.’

‘Okay, so this is the fun part of the evening. You guys ...’ the audience she was meaning, keeping it casual, ‘... have seen, on stage here when we started this event, and in videos shot earlier, where Doctor Watson snap-froze her hamsters. You don’t like people saying you “killed” them, right?’

Georgette agreed she did not. That was the way media liked to represent it.

‘They aren’t any more dead than I was; just inert, showing no vital signs.’

Professor Mirabella gestured to the wings, and three honor students who had been designated as stagehands for the night strode onto the stage wheeling what looked like three incubators with various gas cylinders attached. Inside each was a recumbent hamster.

‘Okay, Georgette, talk us through this.’

Georgette stood now, her lapel mike crackling slightly.

‘Here we have Amelia. You all saw her placed into limbo – that’s my term, not a scientific one – twenty-one minutes ago, by a mixture of extremely low temperature gases. These students have been monitoring to make sure there has been no replacement, right?’

The students, two young women and a young man, nodded.

‘Next to Amelia is Benjy. He has been under for ...’ she checked her watch, ‘... exactly one week. And this here is Columbus, boldly going where no hamster has ever gone before. He has been clinically “dead” for four weeks and three days. This is the longest I have ever had a subject in limbo.’

And now she was nervous, because what if it didn’t work this time? Georgette moved to the incubators and placed her hands on a switch.

‘As you can see on these monitors, there is absolutely no sign of life at present.’

Here goes. She flicked the switch. There was a low hiss as the neutralizing gas was pumped into the cages.

‘I have flicked the switch.’

Bing. Right on cue Amelia’s monitor panel lit up. Interest from the audience but restrained – Hey, you could hear them thinking, it’s only twenty-two minutes.

Bing. Benjy’s monitors started beeping and blinking. There was audible movement in the audience now, people craning to get a view and a few gasps from those close enough to see Benjy stir.

‘Seven days dead and brought back to life,’ Mirabella was a ringmaster, and genuine applause followed. But that sputtered to a halt because as yet there was nothing happening with Columbus. Georgette tried to reassure herself. Some of the others had been sluggish, no cause for real concern.

The monitors remained blank. Amelia was already up sniffing around her incubator but nobody was paying the slightest attention.

‘Is this concerning?’ asked Mirabella finally.

‘It is.’ Georgette could hear the tension in her own voice.

‘Can you “up the dose” as it were?’

‘No. It’s a very precise formula. Either it works or ...’

‘Or you kill a helpless animal,’ someone shouted from the audience.

Tonight was always going to offer potential for disaster but if she were to convince the doubters to give further funding, she needed a home run. Georgette felt she had to respond to the heckler.

'I love my research animals but the implications for treatment of humans is ...'

She didn't know how to finish. It all sounded like self-serving crap. I've been arrogant, too arrogant. I should have tried this in private first, she thought.

Bing.

The monitors began flashing, beeping. Columbus blinked awake, an eye opened. And then he managed a huge yawn. The audience laughed and applauded.

Georgette didn't laugh, she was still scolding herself.

'You cut it fine, kiddo. Was Columbus like the tightrope walker who pretends to fall?'

Harry had made something of an effort. His blue blazer was a trifle small but you could forgive that because it matched his eyes. Since his hair had silvered up a year or so back, they seemed even bluer. Simone and Harry were in the corridor behind the stage, nobody else in earshot.

'It's not a circus.' Although on reflection, that's exactly what it was. 'No. It was stupid of me. I should have -'

'Could have, should have. It was great. I'm proud of you. Your mom would have been too. No Simone?'

'She called. She had a rehearsal.'

'Always the rehearsal. That girl will be rehearsing her own funeral. You hungry? You want to get something?'

She heard the need in his voice, would have succumbed even though she was emotionally exhausted but she caught a glimpse of Mirabella breaking off from a small group, ready to leave.

'I need to speak to Mirabella.'

Harry didn't press. 'Don't forget, Tuesday, your cousin, the Scotsman.'

'I'll be there. Thanks for coming.'

He squeezed her in a big hug. 'Wouldn't miss it for the world. Go on.' He jerked his head in the direction of the exit that Mirabella had just taken.

Georgette found the professor on the sidewalk waiting for her car to pluck her from the cool October air. Car lights cruised by, krill in an ever-flowing dark ocean.

'I'm sorry, I wanted to thank you.'

'That's okay. I didn't want to interrupt you and your dad. He enjoy it?'

‘He did.’ Georgette couldn’t help herself. ‘I don’t suppose you’ve heard anything about my request?’

Mirabella gave a half-smile. ‘I’m guessing you’ve been waiting most of the night to ask me that.’

Georgette shrugged, busted. Like many other scientists exploring cutting-edge research she was dependent on grants. The university grant not only gave her a salary, it triggered matched funding from Rasmussen, a large bio-tech firm that provided her with a fully-equipped and serviced laboratory in their nearby facility and a rental supplement for an apartment otherwise beyond her means. She had applied for further funding but the next stage she had proposed would be contentious.

Mirabella said, ‘I’m not actually on the committee.’

‘No, but you know a lot more people on it than I do.’

‘Your work is impressive, Georgi, really impressive, but I’m not going to lie. University boards and committees are by their nature conservative.’

‘The *Times* article didn’t help?’

‘They are a lot more worried by the cons than they are excited by the pros. Trying your process on a human being ...’

‘You and I both know that I can’t go much further with hamsters. There was a teenage boy in Buffalo last month who drowned. I might have been able to save him.’

‘I know that.’

She went to interject. Mirabella showed ‘stop’.

‘I also know that you have worked out a portable system whereby the body can be transferred to your lab; the chemistry was beyond me but one of my colleagues talked me through it. Even so ...’

She didn’t need to finish, Georgette could have done it for her: even so, a human is a whole other situation – if they are “dead”. The limousine was pulling into the curb. Mirabella reached for her door.

‘They meet next Thursday. You’ll be the first to know. Just ... be realistic, okay?’

The door closed, the car merged with traffic, leaving Georgette like a shipwrecked sailor watching a clipper on the horizon disappear from view.

3

She was naked from the waist down, a pair of silken running shorts absurdly electric blue against the grey October sky lay beside feet still encased in expensive, almost-new sneakers. The blood had zigzagged over her chest before beginning to crust. Her hair was brown, about Georgette's length and her freckles were cute and far too friendly for the monster who must have looked down upon her before discarding her in the crumbling ruins. It could have been a film set, gothic horror, a pretty victim in a tuft of tall grass where chunks of old masonry and bricks fought for territory with angry bracken. But this was no movie, it was all too real, the location just a few hundred yards from Manhattan's east flank.

They were in the ruins of the old smallpox hospital on Roosevelt Island jammed between Queens, where Georgette had been born, and Manhattan where she was still trying to grow up. And looking at a dead young woman who would never get the chance to grow one day older than this. Maybe twenty-five, younger than me, thought Georgette. The current in the East River rushing downtown like office workers who'd caught a signal delay seemed a weird juxtaposition against stony death. Fifty yards away, beyond the iron picket fence that surrounded the tourist attraction, a crowd was growing behind the crime tape. Murder played well in any theatre.

'Gina Scaroldi. A local. Cornell Tech student ID on her.'

Garry Benson was the lead detective. He probably used Georgette more than any of the other Homicide cops. The wind played havoc with his fine fair hair. Scandinavian genes back there somewhere. Georgette noted most guys of that ilk were bald by fifty. Benson still had a good decade to enjoy mussed hair.

Georgette checked her thermometer, felt the chill breeze across her own face, judging its strength and smelling the faint tang of diesel on the back of its hand. Whenever you were estimating a time of death on a body left outdoors, you wanted to use every sense you had. A body left a long time would be far better off with an insect specialist. Drownings or near fresh corpses, that was Georgette's arena.

'Three and a half hours, somewhere around there.'

It was just on 9.15 now.

'So about five forty-five this morning,' said Greta Lipinski, Benson's partner, as if she knew him well enough to realize math wasn't a strong point.

'What I've always said, jogging is a dangerous sport.'

It was one of the crime scene guys. Georgette had been around cops all her life. She didn't take offense even if their comments seemed heartless. It was just a way to cope. But she noticed the photographer react. She didn't recognize him. He was new. He'd get used to it. Or go into aerial or marine photography to escape the memories.

'Twenty-four hour surveillance,' said Georgette, who had noted the sign on arrival.

Benson said, 'Looks like he picked the lock on the gate, made sure it was open, ready. I don't think this is the sort of guy gives us a look at anything useful.'

The gate faced Queens. The path was narrow at this point. There was bracken closer to the river where the killer could hide without having to pick a lock, but it would have been uncomfortable there, and the bracken could have clawed right through his clothes and ripped out DNA. If he had any brains at all he would avoid that.

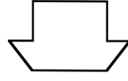
'It would have been dark,' said Lipinski. 'He'd be invisible.'

Georgette couldn't help running in her head the kind of nature film that shocks you as a kid. The crouching lion, the stray impala. Benson put himself in the shoes of the killer.

'If he was hiding back in here, he'd be able to hear her feet slapping the paving, and even if she's cautious, she's not thinking any threat is coming from here because it's fenced off. He dashes out, hits her on the side of the head, see that mark? Drags her in here, rapes her, cuts her throat, or vice versa.'

As Georgette went to stand, she noticed a wound on the inner thigh of the dead girl. 'Wound' was not exactly the right word. It was like a cube of flesh had been excised the way you cut shapes out of dough with

a cookie-cutter. It was only about an inch square but deep, almost to the bone:



‘You get photos of this mark here?’

‘Yeah, Kelvin got plenty. Sorry, Kelvin – Doctor Georgette Watson.’

They each nodded. She wondered if he would puke.

‘What do you think it is?’ asked Benson.

She said she thought it looked like a hat, side on.

‘Like there’s the thin brim and here’s the crown.’

‘That’s what Greta thought.’

‘But see here ...’ Benson leaned down and pointed with a pen to the ‘brim’, ‘... the ends seem angled in.’

Georgette scrutinized. He was right. She took Benson’s pen off him and copied the shape onto her arm. Turned it around. It looked like an inverted house with most of the pointy roof chopped off. That was as close as she could get.

‘Got me beat. Maybe it’s a symbol.’

Benson scuffed the dirt. ‘Whatever it is, I don’t like it. They start doing this shit, it means more might be in store.’

The worst part of the NYPD job – besides the inevitable corpse – was having to write up her report. Though she was able to record her observations on the spot, they still had to be transcribed into a hard-copy document, so she hauled herself back to the Homicide squad room, that on this occasion meant the Queens North command at Forest Hills. Benson and Lipinski had stayed at the scene to interview potential witnesses. If the victim was a regular, chances were somebody would recognize her.

Was it her imagination or had Garry Benson been flirting with her when he told her how the *Times* photograph made her look like a film star? No, she was going to shut that thought down. As well as whether Mirabella might have had any success in talking the board around. That question had been ransacking her brain every spare minute.

A shadow fell across her desk. The new guy. He was standing there with a coffee in each fist.

‘I got you a long black, or one with cream.’

The only time she grabbed coffee here was when the heat was down and her hands needed warming. Her guess was East River water might taste similar. But Kevin – no, Kelvin – had gone to the trouble so she took the one with cream.

‘Thanks, Kelvin.’

When he hung there, she added, ‘Is there something?’

He lowered his voice, looked around, warily. ‘Is it always that ... bad?’

‘Often a lot worse.’ There was no point sugar-coating it.

‘You get used to it, right?’

‘You can tolerate it better, that’s all.’ She didn’t say that the majority of those in his job would go onto something else after two or three years. He didn’t comment, just nodded and headed over to the elevators. That was the thing with murder: you could ignore it, but it never left you. She did this job for one reason only, money. She needed the money to make her dream a reality. That dream was to bring people thought dead back to life. But if the board wasn’t going to ...

There she went again. Full circle.

By the time Georgette arrived home, she’d resisted at least a half-dozen times the urge to call Mirabella. Tonight she was going to meet her cousin – or, more correctly, Harry’s cousin. Maybe bagpipes and haggis could take her mind off her research. She stood at the door of her apartment building looking for her keys. Not them too. She couldn’t have lost them, could she? But maybe she had. She always kept them in the inside pocket of her handbag but they were not there. A disaster script had already been written in her brain – buzzing her neighbors to get inside this door, then calling Simone to get the spare pair to her apartment – when her frantic search revealed them underneath her hairbrush. That’s right. After she’d discarded the crime-scene suit she’d re-brushed her hair and for some reason she must have grabbed her keys. Well, she had been distracted. Garry Benson. He may not be that attractive but he was single ...

She stopped herself: No, don’t even think about it, girl.

An hour later, she was on the sidewalk out front, freshly showered and dressed. Where the hell was Simone? Surely her band rehearsal had finished by now. Probably having hot sex with the drummer – Presley, was that his name? Or was that the bass player who preceded him? A deep rumble gave away her sister’s imminent arrival. The old Silverado cut across a lane of traffic and skidded to a halt to the eruption of angry

horns. Simone's finger extended out of the window and pointed to the dark sky.

She yelled, 'New York's Finest, assholes!' Which, like most of what came out of her sister's mouth, was a lie or at best distortion. From Simone's point of view, having a dad and sister on the department transferred all benefits to her.

Georgette got in. 'You're late.'

'Not anymore.' Simone tramped it out of there, more angry horns in her wake. Georgette always missed her sister until they were actually together again. She shuddered at the mess: used take-out containers, a hairbrush, scripts for TV commercials and some aspiring-director's no-budget short film.

'How did your talk go?' Simone asked, looking in the rear-view, admiring her curls. 'I would have been there but ... well, you tell me your news.'

Georgette couldn't fathom how Simone was not involved in accidents, figured her modus operandi hadn't changed; she caused them but skated by unscathed.

'Pretty good. For a minute I thought Columbus wasn't going to make it. I was worried. But he came through. You got a mention.'

Simone smiled, pleased. 'You tell them I have an audition for *Cabaret* starring as Sally Bowles?'

'Get out!'

This was great news. The last time she'd seen her sister on stage she had been playing rat-excrement in some play 'developed' by the members of Simone's co-op. Homeland Security could have used it as the ultimate threat on suspected terrorists.

'What venue?'

'St Christopher's.'

'The all-boys school?'

'Yeah. The boys are doing their own production. They wanted the real thing for Sally so they advertized. That's where I was last night, casting.'

Georgette knew her sister well enough to figure the audition story was in part a deliberate distraction to cover up her being late again.

'You were late because you were having sex with the drummer, am I right?'

Simone crunched a gear. 'That's over.'

Aha, exactly as Georgette had predicted when they last met.

Simone turned narrow eyes on her. 'Yeah, come on, give me the gloat.'

Georgette said, 'I'm not gloating.'

'You are. You're glowing in gloat. Like you swallowed kryptonite or something.'

More or less true. She said, 'I feel vindicated, that's all. I told you, dating at work is a bad idea.'

'I didn't date him, I just slept with him. And anyway, a drummer is stuck up the back, you don't have to look at him.' She changed the subject again with the same speed and lack of warning that she changed lanes.

'Dad told you anything about our cousin?'

Harry Watson had long since ceased trying to coordinate with his younger daughter. He figured it was much simpler to pile that responsibility on Georgette while he studied the ponies or had relaxing drinks with his pals, most of whom were retired cops.

'Other than he's Scottish and a university professor, nothing.'

'What's that on your arm, some jailhouse tattoo?'

Georgette told her about how her day started with a murdered girl on Roosevelt Island.

'Benson called me a little while ago to say they now think she was strangled first, then raped and stabbed.'

Simone made the kind of small bitter sound you do when it's too horrible to find words. Then she said, 'He's sweet on you.'

'Benson?'

'Yeah. I can tell. You have no radar with sex. Actually, I think his partner likes you more.'

'She's not gay.'

'She's on the precinct softball team, come on.'

Maybe Lipinski was gay. Georgette wondered if that made life simpler for her. Doubted it. There was nothing easy about finding partners, or people wouldn't spend so much time worrying about it. Simone of course didn't worry, she just kept sampling. True, Benson was attractive but then Vance had been undeniably handsome and look where that had got her.

'It's a ship,' Simone said matter-of-factly, nodding at the image on her arm.

And now Georgette looked at it again she saw what she meant, like a container ship or one of those fancy cruise ships that housed a thousand people, in a big apartment building-style structure.

'You could be right, you know.'

'Of course I'm right. Call Benson. Or I will.'

'I'm not giving you his phone number.'

'See, I knew you were hot for him.'

Georgette's turn to change the subject. 'He's cooking,' she said.

'Dad, not our cousin?'

'Yeah.'

'Pity.'

It would be steak and salad. It was always steak and salad.

Harry Watson stood outside in the cool, still air and flicked the steak over on the grill. You went to a restaurant these days and ordered a steak, it practically bleated. He liked his steak approaching black but you asked for that, they looked at you like you had been found with a young woman chained up in your cellar, or worse, claimed you didn't believe in global warming. Personally, he was a climate-change believer. His bones ached a lot more now than thirty years ago. He glanced through the window into the kitchen, saw his two girls preparing the salad and getting the cutlery, chatting. It made him feel warm inside. He recalled the same scene twenty years earlier when they were just girls who played with dolls and read pony stories. Helen would have been so pleased. Mind you, she'd be fretting – neither one married yet, not even close. He'd got a little excited earlier in the year when Georgette let that publisher guy move in. But now the publisher was pulped. Not that Harry actually liked the guy, but Georgette had, and he'd forced himself to listen to the wisdom of Helen who was always whispering into his ear, 'Harry, stop being a cop, give the man a chance.'

Simone was at the other extreme. Four guys a month, most losers or druggies.

Georgette poked her head out. 'We're pretty much ready.'

'He texted to say he's on his way. So, Benson called you in?'

They had talked briefly earlier.

'Twenty-four year old female student jogging on Roosevelt Island, raped, throat cut, around six this morning.'

Harry never heard about a homicide of a young woman without thinking of his daughters. He had trained both girls relentlessly to be careful, to be aware of human predators, but with Simone there was always that dark fear crouching in a corner that he'd turn up one day and discover his own daughter was the victim. You could only play with so many loaded weapons before one went off. And the way she dressed! Tonight was no exception, and this was a family gathering.

He needled her: 'Ah, there's that postage stamp I was looking for – disguised as a skirt on your butt.'

'Ha, ha. You should go into comedy work.'

'No, I should go into dressmaking. That skirt works out about thirty bucks a thread.'

'In contrast to that shirt. You obviously clothed yourself for zero from a dumpster.'

'Not zero, there was the cost of the bleach to get out the bloodstains.'

Harry enjoyed the banter with his daughters. If a jibe had been a jab they both could have fought welter-weight.

Georgette said, 'I like the shirt. It's the one Mom bought you, right?'

She never missed a thing.

'Yes, it is.'

He loved them. They were all he cared about in the whole world. Woe betide anybody who did them wrong.

The bell rang. His guest was here.

Ian Watson was somewhere in his late fifties, sandy-haired, warm of nature. Whether that was his natural disposition or enhanced by the consumption of whisky from the bottle he'd brought for her father, Georgette couldn't decide. They were around the table in the modest dining room where she had grown up. The Scotsman had described his family and life in Edinburgh with a deal of vivacity, a natural storyteller.

'Your father tells me your field is cryogenics?'

'She is the leading expert in the US,' Harry said.

'Dad ...'

Simone tag-teamed with a Scots accent. 'It's troo. She revived this hamster had been did fer a month.' She winked. 'How's my accent, dope hey? I played Lady Macbeth off-off-off Broadway.'

'Impressive, Simone but ... reviving a dead hamster?' Ian Watson shook his head at the magnitude of that and sipped his whisky. 'If that's not proof of genetics, I don't know what is.' He appeared to realize they had no idea what he was talking about. 'You've not heard of your great-great-grandfather, John Watson?'

Georgette found Scottish people hard to understand but enjoyed the rising lilt. She shook her head.

'You?' he turned to Harry but he was equally lost.

'Well, then ...' Ian Watson leaned forward. Georgette could see he was relishing having a tale up his sleeve. 'I think your progenitor, old

John Watson, was into what in those days, the eighteen nineties, was a verboten area, the dark sciences, necromancy even.'

Simone slugged her brew. 'Do tell. I love a skeleton in the family closet.'

Ian Watson poured himself a nip more whisky and elaborated. Some years ago, when his father died, he had inherited trunks full of old family memorabilia. His father, an engineer, had never troubled himself to investigate these old family treasures but Ian, on long-service leave and laid up for a month after a hip operation, had slowly waded through them, and eventually came across the diary of John Watson.

'Eighteen ninety-two were the earliest entries. Tragically, flooding and mould had gotten to it and much of it was destroyed but I gathered our forebear was a medico living in London. The really fascinating entries however, indicated that he was experimenting with cryogenics.'

'No!' Georgette was not one given to exclaiming and she noticed both her father and sister raised eyebrows at her outburst.

'I am afraid so. There is no doubt that our relative met with James Dewar in London in eighteen ninety-two ...'

Georgette explained for Harry and Simone's benefit. 'Some consider him the father of cryogenics.'

'He made a good whisky, didn't he?' Harry's eyes twinkled as he poured himself a shot. Simone chuckled. Georgette could have slapped them: this was actually interesting.

'Anyway, it seemed their meetings were somewhat secretive but I couldn't make head nor tail of it until, right at the bottom of the trunk, I found a few surviving part-pages from the diary that had obviously fallen out.'

These were dated 1891 and, according to Ian Watson, shed new light on the mystery.

'I'm not saying everything became clear but what I gathered was that at some point, around early ninety-one, one of John Watson's great friends had perished in a lake in Europe ... Switzerland, I later worked out. John had evidently retrieved the body from the freezing lake and was keeping it frozen somewhere in the hope that one day there would be a technology capable of reviving his friend. It was all very hush hush of course because in those days it would have been considered akin to witchcraft.'

Georgette was flabbergasted.

'Well before Walt Disney,' cracked Simone.

'It sounds like one of his stories,' said Harry, reaching for a refill.

'I assure you, this is genuine. I've seen plenty of old documents and these were the real deal.'

'I gather he didn't succeed?' Georgette forked an olive.

'Not from what I read. It was quite touching actually. There is a section written much later, after World War One. John Watson laments not achieving his goal, says he's too old now. I'll send you the diary when I get back. I would have brought it if I realized.'

'That's very kind of you.'

'No trouble. A toast to our erstwhile relative, John Watson.'

They all drank, Georgette only with water. What a terrible thing, she reflected, your whole life dedicated to a project you never achieved. Then she shuddered and thought, I hope that's not a curse that runs in the family.

Even from the distance behind the crime-tape he had recognized the Watson girl. He'd zoomed in with his camera too, got a good look at her face. Strong resemblance to her father. Ironic she was trying to raise the dead while he himself was intent on increasing their number. They were like Greek gods lined up on opposite sides. He wasn't quite sure yet what he wanted to do with her. Oh, he knew how she was going to end up, but for full satisfaction you wanted the sequence of things just so. Still, it was tempting. Groundwork had been laid. And it would be ultimately so satisfying. People had to be punished for the wrongs they had done, and the punishment needed to be exquisite, not just pain but the worst kind of pain – 'If only I had done this and not this, if only I had seen what was staring me in the face...'

Too few people read the Bible these days. They talked of Yin and Yang and all that trendy shit but they mocked those truths that anybody with any experience in life came to realize were inescapable. Life is pain. Escape from pain was possible, but not without correct planning, and adherence to that plan.

He dropped his car into gear and cruised away from the modest Queens house.

Soon, he told himself.

For now there were other matters that needed his attention.