

The perfect escape could be the perfect murder.

LYING *in the* DEEP



DIANA URBAN

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RAZORBILL



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For Grandma Gloria

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PROLOGUE

NOW

I didn't realize there'd be this much blood.

Yeah, he'd said there was blood all over the room. But I thought of how my mother would always huff and say things like "Oh, Jade, you got ice cream all over yourself." I'd glance down, expecting to be covered in chocolate goo, and there'd be this one lone dribble trailing down my shirt. Everyone always exaggerated these kinds of things.

But nope.

Not this time.

This time, there was literally blood *all over the room*.

A sea breeze rustled the curtains hanging from the wide-open French balcony doors, and even though I'd just been out on the top deck, I shivered, goose bumps coating my arms like a rash. I took another step into the suite to get a closer look, still gripping the cabin doorframe as though it could anchor me to a reality in which my best friend was still alive.

Well, ex-best friend.

That ship had sailed months ago.

Red slashed the ruffled white sheets, most of the blood pooled on the left side of the bed, like that's where it started. Like that's where she'd been stabbed. Smears of it angled off to the right, toward the balcony—had she been dragged?—and there were even some maroon flecks on the ornate opaque room divider at the foot of the bed, separating the bedroom from a small living room area. One of the beige armchairs—the one closest to the balcony—hadn't escaped the splatter.

Smudges streaked the balcony's stark white doorframe, too, the door open, ominous, like a gaping void before the endless sea.

The buzzing in my ears drowned out the voices behind me in the hall—yelling voices, frantic voices—and I thought of the blood staining my own shirt's hem. I tugged my jacket closed, hiding it . . . praying they wouldn't think I did this.

After all, there wasn't a snowball's chance in hell she'd survived.

There was so much blood, too much blood, and the way the balcony rail was coated in it . . .

But then a thought crossed my mind, a thought that made me falter back a step, that made bile rise in my throat and shame burn my cheeks.

Yet I couldn't help but think it.

That spoiled, selfish brat got exactly what she deserved.



THREE WEEKS EARLIER

Oh, for crying out loud. I could count the number of times I'd ever left California on one hand, and now here I was in the bustling port in Amsterdam, waiting to embark on Campus on Board, surrounded by chattering classmates, aka potential new friends, about to set sail on the greatest adventure of my life for an entire semester, daydreaming about murder again.

There was no stopping it. Every time there was the tiniest lull in my day, my mind would snap to vengeance. Murderous vengeance. It was getting exhausting, honestly.

It'd been two months since the love of my life, Silas, dumped me for my best friend, Lainey.

Via text message, no less.

He'd been spending the summer interning at her dad's pharmaceutical company in Boston, and yeah, putting an entire country between me and them might strike you as a recipe for disaster. But I never in a million years imagined it'd end that way, let alone at all. Silas and I had fallen in love at first sight, like that cheesy stuff that happens in the movies, but *real*. It happened the first Friday of freshman year, when my new roommate, Lainey, dragged me to a frat party, wild and wicked, determined to break my lifelong sobriety streak. We'd been clutching red Solo cups filled with God-knew-what in the corner of some packed living

room that reeked of cheap beer, tittering over the tequila she'd snuck in in a flask, like that somehow made us fancier than everyone else.

For no reason at all, my gaze had flicked over her shoulder, and there he was on the staircase. Arms crossed, sans beverage, leaning against the wall as he scanned the packed room, tall, tan, and lean, with this sharp jaw and thick, sideswept chestnut hair. Not a moment later, his sparkling hazel eyes found mine. Like fate.

I had no clue Silas was Stanford's newest baseball star, no idea he was destined for the majors and the fame and huge contracts that came with it. All I cared about was how his lopsided grin turned my insides to mush, how everything else in the room seemed to disappear, even Lainey, even the bass blasting from a speaker perched on the windowsill next to me.

He was my first everything, and then, after nearly two years together—two years of cheering him on from the bleachers, of clinging together beneath his bedsheets, of planning a future together—all I got was a stupid text.

I'd memorized it. Memorized every word, searching for meaning in the letters, hunting for some logical explanation.

Hey Jade, it's over. We haven't been working for a while. I'm with Lainey now and it's not up for discussion. We're both blocking your number, so don't bother trying.

Brutal, I know.

As for Lainey, my supposed BFF . . . she'd totally iced me out. No text, no DM, nothing.

We'd been roomies since freshman year, though let's be real—as the daughter of one of America's wealthiest pharmaceutical tycoons, she could've easily snagged a fancy off-campus loft. But she wanted a “normal” college experience—and what Lainey wanted, Lainey got—so she wound up in the dorms with me. I was as “normal” as they came: a broke nerd raised by a single mom in rural California who only managed to swing Stanford on scholarship.

We'd instantly glommed together despite the differences stretching between us like a chasm—me, eager to bust from my shell, a loyal confidant, a motivating study partner; she, a magnet for attention and an easy flirt, the way she'd flash her radiant smile and make you feel like the sun was shining at night. She was stunning, because of course she was,

with her silky platinum hair, eyes blue as the winter sky, rosy high cheekbones, and rosier full lips. Forget the money—Lainey could steal your heart just by breathing, charm you with a glance, convince you of anything. She could get whatever the hell she wanted, even if she didn't already have it all.

Apparently, that included the love of *my* life.

Hence, murder. Lots and lots of daydreaming about murder.

Poisoning Lainey's tequila might do it, though shoving her off her dad's penthouse balcony would be way more gratifying. I imagined sneaking up there as she stretched on a lounge chair sunbathing, her smooth, creamy skin tanning like my pale, blotchy skin never could. I imagined chucking her phone so she'd scramble to the edge and watch it sail twenty stories down. I imagined pushing her so hard, she'd flip over the rail, legs tumbling over her head. I imagined her shrieking the whole way, and moments later, the satisfying spl—

"Oh my actual God, why am I not getting *any* signal right now?" The tall boy waiting in line behind me brandished his phone every which way, tearing me from my blood-spattered thoughts. "It's not like we're in the middle of nowhere."

"Maybe it's a dead spot?" I suggested unhelpfully, tugging my thick, dark curls into a low, messy bun so they'd stop whipping in my face in the unseasonably cool breeze.

"But this is our last chance to have cell service till the first port." As though he could reason a signal into existence. "Gah, this is gonna be torture. Can you believe we only get fifty megabytes of internet a day? That's nothing. How do they expect us to get any homework done? Scoot up, by the way."

There was a huge gap between me and the person ahead. "Oh, sorry. Jet lag." And homicide.

I slung my backpack onto my shoulder and wheeled up my two heavy suitcases. Embarkation seemed like a bajillion-step process after getting zero sleep in two days. After this check-in line, we had to wait in another line to drop off our luggage, then yet another line to board, then—you guessed it—another line to register inside. I hoped I'd have enough time

before lifeboat training to scope out my room, though at this point, things were looking bleak.

“No worries,” said the boy. “You didn’t fly in *this* morning, did you?”

“Yep, I did.” My scholarship covered Campus on Board, but no extras like hotel stays, so I decided to fly in the same day as embarkation. Naturally, my flight from Sacramento to New York was delayed four hours, so I missed my connection to Amsterdam, rebooked to a later flight, and soared over the Atlantic in a state of sheer panic. Extremely on-brand for me.

“Oh my God, you must be absolutely dead right now. I’m Miguel Diaz, by the way?” He said it like a question, peering at me expectantly, like I might recognize his name.

Nope.

Still, I gave him a warm smile and stuck out my hand. “Jade Miller.” I was usually shy with strangers, but it was so much easier when they were super talkative. Like Lainey. It had been impossible not to warm to her immediately.

He gave my hand a little jiggle. “Do you have service?” Talk about a one-track mind.

I shrugged. “I don’t have a global data plan.”

“Oh, weird.”

Not that weird if you were pinching pennies. My cheeks flushed. “Well, I don’t want to be tethered to my phone whenever we’re at port.”

Thinking of all those port stops—eleven countries in four months!—and soaking in all those cultures made excitement fizz through my veins like shaken soda. If anything could piece my shattered heart back together, it was this.

“The semester will be over like that,” I said, snapping my fingers. “And I don’t want to waste any of it staring at a screen. I want to be present.”

That, and I didn’t want to be tempted to Instagram-stalk Lainey and Silas at every port.

My heart clenched to think how Lainey and I had planned this trip together, huddled on our shaggy dorm room rug over brochures she’d requested via snail mail so it’d feel more real than scouring a website, dreaming of clubbing in Greece, sunbathing in Malaysia, tasting authentic

sushi in Japan. This was supposed to be *our* adventure. But she couldn't possibly show her face here after what she did. We'd originally planned to room together, but when I logged into my CoB portal, my room assignment was back to pending. Plus, she hadn't bragged about CoB on Instagram in months, which basically confirmed it.

"Okay, so I totally dig this whole *Eat, Pray, Love* vibe you've got going on"—Miguel waggled a finger at me from head to toe—"but if I don't get my videos uploaded, I'm going to lose followers, so."

"What kinds of vid—"

"Skincare tips! I'm almost up to a million subs on YouTube. And that's not including Insta and TikTok—"

As he rattled off his metrics, I scanned the long line ahead of us. Fat chance I'd get to snag the bed I wanted. For whatever reason, I never received my roommate assignment, but I knew I'd have two of them, since I could only afford the small cabins with one single bed and a bunk bed. Something about bunks freaked me out; I worried I'd roll off the top or be crushed on the bottom—

My breath hitched as something familiar, so familiar, caught my eye two lines over—platinum hair coaxed into loose beach waves shimmering in the sunlight. But, no, it couldn't be . . . So many girls styled their hair that way. Though as I kept staring, her cackling laughter dispersed in the air like a virus, turning the fizz in my veins flat. I knew that laugh, the mockery it implied. And as she turned, her sparkling grin coming into full view, I saw I was right.

There, two lines over, was none other than Lainey Silverton.

She had some gall showing up after all. As usual, she was all sleek and sharp edges, her powder-pink blazer probably costing more than my tuition. She had one elbow perched on her Louis Vuitton suitcase's handle, wearing her usual bug-eyed Gucci sunglasses, her large gold hoop earrings swinging as she jabbered excitedly to—I couldn't tell. A group of chattering middle-aged couples behind her blocked whoever it was from view. I leaned to get a better look, standing on my tiptoes, gripping the handle of my suitcase to balance myself, and—*no*. My stomach dropped directly into my uterus.

This couldn't be happening. There was absolutely no way this could be happening.

It was Silas.

He was never supposed to come on this trip. How could he even afford it? Had Lainey bought his way on? Oh God. How could this be happening? How—

“Are you okay?” Miguel asked, finally noticing I wasn't paying attention to a word he was saying. He followed my shocked stare and scowled. “Oh, Christ, it's *that* girl.”

I winced. “You know her?”

Miguel nodded. “Lainey, right? Yeah, she's also gunning for the student YouTuber role.”

“Wait, what?” I shook my head, confused. “I thought they picked the student assistants ahead of time. Didn't they all board a day early?” I'd applied for a student assistant role since it came with a grant but didn't get picked because I was already on full scholarship.

“Mm-hmm, but the person they picked had to drop out of CoB last minute. They're doing this super-ridiculous audition process, which, whatever—”

“Well, what the hell is she doing in *that* line?” That line was for the “lifelong learners”—grown-ass adults who wanted to study and sightsee with the rest of us college kids—but it was hard to tell them apart from the parents swarming their kids, readying to bid them bon voyage.

In fact, now that I had a clearer view, I spotted Lainey's dad nearby—Boston big-shot Derek Silverton, CEO of Sanatek. I almost didn't recognize him without his usual sports coat. Now he wore a striped navy polo shirt and khaki trousers, though his graying, dark hair was slicked back as always, his mouth set in his usual smug expression as he stared at his phone. I bet they'd spent the day leisurely sight-seeing in Amsterdam. How nice for them.

“So apparently,” said Miguel, “she got one of the big suites on an upper deck. I bet she totally bribed someone. There's no other way.”

I jabbed my cheek with my tongue and narrowed my eyes. Wow. She really did get whatever the hell she wanted, didn't she? And she was beautiful, charismatic, heir to a freaking fortune.

So why'd she have to take Silas, too?

It wasn't right. It wasn't *fair*. I curled my hands into fists and wanted nothing more than to smash the glass barriers lining the dock and slice her with the shards—

"If she bribes anyone for the YouTuber role," said Miguel, glaring, too, "I'll flip the hell out. You know, getting that could totally put me on the map as a travel influencer. Don't get me wrong, I love the skincare stuff, but free moisturizer isn't exactly on par with a free stay at a five-star hotel in Fiji, you know?"

I scoffed. "Meanwhile, she could afford any five-star hotel she wants."

"Exactly! So, wait, how do *you* know her?"

"She ruined my life."

Miguel's plucked eyebrows shot up, and he gaped at me. "Go on . . . ?"

Ugh, I didn't want to get into my whole depressing life story right now. "Let's just say, we used to be best friends, and now we're not."

"But why—"

"You know what?" I said, eager to change the subject. "If you want to beat her for that role, I bet CoB would love some boarding footage. All the past YouTubers boarded separately, but I bet so many people want to know what this process is like. And *she's* clearly not bothering."

Miguel's eyes lit up. "Oh my God," he muttered, like he couldn't believe he hadn't thought of it himself. He whipped out his phone again and started taking a panoramic shot of the pier as I stared at Silas, my chest filled with such an aching yearning, I thought it might pop.

He wore that lopsided grin of his, pointing out something about the *Sea Voyager*—the gleaming white vessel at the end of the pier that'd be our home for the next four months. He was finally free of his arm sling—the one he'd worn most of the summer as his Instagram feed filled with photos of him and Lainey, photos I'd pored over, sobbed over, wondering what went wrong. Lainey pressed a hand to his shoulder, leaning close, probably to tell him something without her father overhearing. Silas laughed, eyes glittering with amusement, and I swallowed hard as the breakfast sandwich I'd scarfed down on the plane threatened to come back up.

Miguel tapped my shoulder. I turned, and his phone was in my face. "So, tell me your name, where you're from—"

“Gah, not me.” I raised a hand, hiding my face. “I look like death right now.”

He stopped recording and scanned my face, quirking a brow. “You’re not wrong.”

I snorted. “Thanks.”

“When we’re on board, remind me to introduce you to caffeine gel.” He turned to the person behind him and made a cooing sound, liking whatever he saw. “Hi, hi! I’m shooting footage for the CoB YouTube channel, mind if I ask you a few questions?”

Whoever it was grunted something that sort of resembled *Yeah*.

My attention slid back to the happy couple. I still wasn’t sure what shocked me more—how the breakup came out of left field or the callousness of it, the unwillingness to talk, blocking me as though *I’d* done something wrong. Or maybe it was how both people I loved most in this world had betrayed me so epically.

“You’re the best,” said Miguel. “So, tell me your name, where you’re from, and what your day has looked like so far—”

“I said, yeah, I *do* mind,” someone said gruffly. I glanced over at the boy Miguel was harassing, instantly getting brooding vibes from his charcoal-gray army jacket over a black T-shirt and distressed black denim. His long black lashes hid his eyes as his thumbs roved over his phone screen, but when he finally glanced up, raking back his dark tousled hair, I saw his eyes were such a deep shade of brown, they were almost black. They flicked to mine for the briefest moment before focusing on his screen again.

“I promise this’ll just take a sec,” Miguel persisted.

The sound of Lainey’s tinkling laughter floated over—apparently at something Silas had said. She flirtatiously whacked his arm before sneaking a peek at her phone. She never could stop checking her social media notifications, thriving on likes and attention, despite her claims that she hated it.

“I don’t have a sec,” said the brooding boy.

Lainey was scanning the crowd now, a hand on her hip as she took in the scene—

“Um, you literally have so many seconds right now,” Miguel said, motioning to the line. This time, the boy ignored him.

Lainey shaded her eyes despite her huge sunglasses—

“Yeesh,” Miguel bristled, back at my side. “This guy thinks he’s the shit.”

But I was too focused on Lainey to respond, or even care. Her line of sight was about to reach me—

And there it was.

Lainey stilled.

All I could see were those bug-eyed black lenses, but I knew she’d spotted me. She pursed her full lips, her whole body going stiff, and the air seemed to run out of oxygen despite the sea breeze ruffling my curls. There was no joy in seeing me—only dismay. Silas was staring ahead at the *Sea Voyager* again, seeming to say something to Lainey, something she was ignoring.

Finally, he glanced at her. I couldn’t hear him from here, but I could read his lips—lips that used to roam all over me. *What’s wrong?* After throwing one last bitter look my way, she said, loud and clear, “She came anyway. She’s right over there.”

Of course I came anyway.

I wasn’t the one who stabbed my best friend in the back.

I wasn’t the one who stole the love of her life.

I wasn’t the one who stomped on her soul with no remorse.

And now that spoiled, selfish cow was going to ruin this trip—a trip I’d been looking forward to for *years*.

Little did I know how much chaos she’d sow.



As I waited in the registration line on board to get my ID card, I took in my surroundings, mouth agape—this place was way more glam than I’d expected. The stained-glass, skylight-topped atrium soared three decks above the crowded reception lobby, each level fitted with ornate brass railings and bedecked with oil paintings and bronze sculptures.

But as I made a beeline to my cabin on Deck 4, my surroundings became a blur as the way Silas had spotted me before needled my mind. Surprised recognition had filled those honeyed-hazel eyes, and he’d flinched a bit, seeming to stop breathing as he soaked in the sight of me. I could swear he almost took a step toward me. But then those beautiful eyes turned cold as an iceberg as he clenched his square jaw and balled his hands into fists.

Like *I’d* done something wrong.

Technically, if I hadn’t asked Lainey to get that summer internship for Silas at her dad’s company, none of this would’ve happened. But at the time, all I cared about was making sure Silas didn’t drop out of Stanford.

After he shattered his throwing elbow in a skiing accident last spring, Stanford revoked his full scholarship since his injury wasn’t baseball related. All the physical therapy in the world wouldn’t bring him back to full strength. But, like me, he couldn’t afford Stanford otherwise—not without some serious financial aid.

“Dammit, Jade, what’m I gonna do?” he’d asked as we huddled on his bed, gaping at the email on his phone, eyes watering—not from pain, but

from devastation over losing his future. *Our* future. We'd talked of getting married after graduation, of me starting a remote business so I could travel with him wherever he played ball. I never wanted to be tethered to some desk in a cubicle farm anyway, or take orders from some micromanaging boss with a power trip.

So this plan was perfect.

It was *freedom*.

And now it was gone.

"Don't worry. Everything'll be fine." I'd cupped his cheek, wiping away a tear with my thumb.

He'd leaned into my palm. "I lost *everything* . . ."

"Listen. Everything seems terrible now, and it's going to feel terrible for a while. But you're strong and determined and capable, and you'll get through this."

"*How?*"

I dropped my hands. That, I didn't know. Anguish clawed at my insides. I wished I could take back that terrible weekend, that I'd insisted he stay with me instead of goofing off with his buddies at a ski lodge at Lake Tahoe. But I wasn't possessive like that, even after seeing what happened with Mom and Dad. Especially then. Trust is freedom.

I *needed* freedom.

"You can take out student loans, can't you?" I'd suggested.

"Not halfway through like this. The interest rates would kill me . . . I'd be buried in debt forever. I'm gonna have to drop out."

Then he'd probably move back home to Tennessee. My chest compressed. "*No*," I'd choked out. "You can't."

"Well, what'm I gonna do with a history degree, anyway?" Silas never wanted to do anything other than play baseball.

"You can switch majors—"

"To *what*? I have no idea what I'd even want to do."

I'd known for ages I wanted to be a solopreneur—to code an app, market the hell out of it, rinse, repeat, until I found a big hit. And all I'd need was a laptop. My career could blossom without ever having to put down roots, without ever feeling *trapped* like I'd felt growing up. So