

"A marvelously plotted read." —DAVID BALDACCI

A THRILLER

**THE
SPY
COAST
TESS
GERRITSEN**

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

PRAISE FOR *THE SPY COAST*

“Tess Gerritsen writes in a smoothly elegant style; it’s always a delight to read her. *The Spy Coast* is a marvelously plotted read with action-packed pages, g-force twists and turns, and a platoon of fascinating characters. I truly hope to see Maggie Bird and her team of silver-haired helpers on the pages again.”

—David Baldacci, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author

“Master storyteller Tess Gerritsen has written an ingenious, spellbinding novel that moves from Bangkok to a small town in Maine, seductive settings where secrets are kept and lives upended . . . *The Spy Coast* is utterly thrilling, full of morally complex characters with deeply buried secrets and a life-and-death chase into the past and back again. It’s a great novel.”

—Luanne Rice, *New York Times* bestselling author

“Powerful, resonant, absorbing, freighted with menace and suspense . . . Gerritsen is a born storyteller, and this new series showcases her talents more than ever. Irresistible and highly recommended!”

—Lee Child, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author

“A riveting tale filled with engaging characters. I look forward to the rest of the series.”

—Kathy Reichs, author of the Temperance Brennan *Bones* series

“Tess Gerritsen is a brilliant, must-read novelist, and she’s done it again with *The Spy Coast*. Readers will want to follow the adventures of Maggie Bird and her band of Mainer compatriots for a long, long time.”

—C. J. Box, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Storm Watch*

“For decades, Midcoast, Maine, has enjoyed a reputation as a haven for spies living in anonymous retirement. Now bestselling author Tess Gerritsen has taken this apocryphal (or not!) premise and transformed it

into a crackerjack thriller. *The Spy Coast* is my favorite kind of page-turner, rooted in relatable, if ruthless, characters, and grounded in a meticulously observed sense of place.”

—Paul Doiron, bestselling author of the Mike Bowditch novels

**THE
SPY
COAST**

OTHER TITLES BY TESS GERRITSEN

Choose Me (with Gary Braver)

The Shape of Night

Playing with Fire

The Bone Garden

Gravity

Bloodstream

Life Support

Harvest

Keeper of the Bride

Thief of Hearts

In Their Footsteps

Girl Missing (Previous title: *Peggy Sue Got Murdered*)

Presumed Guilty

Whistleblower

Never Say Die

Under the Knife

Call After Midnight

Rizzoli & Isles

The Surgeon

The Apprentice

The Sinner

Body Double

Vanish

The Mephisto Club

The Keepsake

Ice Cold
The Silent Girl
Last to Die
Die Again
I Know a Secret
Listen to Me

**THE
SPY
COAST**

A THRILLER

**TESS
GERRITSEN**

 **THOMAS & MERCER**

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, organizations, places, events, and incidents are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Otherwise, any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

Text copyright © 2023 by Tess Gerritsen
All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced, or stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without express written permission of the publisher.

Published by Thomas & Mercer, Seattle
www.apub.com

Amazon, the Amazon logo, and Thomas & Mercer are trademarks of Amazon.com, Inc., or its affiliates.

ISBN-13: 9781662515125 (hardcover)
ISBN-13: 9781662515132 (paperback)
ISBN-13: 9781662515118 (digital)

Cover design by Jarrod Taylor
Cover image: © nuttapon kupkaew / Shutterstock; © baona, © bildfokus / Getty Images

First edition

To Will

CONTENTS

<u>CHAPTER 1</u>
<u>CHAPTER 2</u>
<u>CHAPTER 3</u>
<u>CHAPTER 4</u>
<u>CHAPTER 5</u>
<u>CHAPTER 6</u>
<u>CHAPTER 7</u>
<u>CHAPTER 8</u>
<u>CHAPTER 9</u>
<u>CHAPTER 10</u>
<u>CHAPTER 11</u>
<u>CHAPTER 12</u>
<u>CHAPTER 13</u>
<u>CHAPTER 14</u>
<u>CHAPTER 15</u>
<u>CHAPTER 16</u>
<u>CHAPTER 17</u>
<u>CHAPTER 18</u>
<u>CHAPTER 19</u>
<u>CHAPTER 20</u>
<u>CHAPTER 21</u>
<u>CHAPTER 22</u>
<u>CHAPTER 23</u>
<u>CHAPTER 24</u>
<u>CHAPTER 25</u>
<u>CHAPTER 26</u>
<u>CHAPTER 27</u>
<u>CHAPTER 28</u>
<u>CHAPTER 29</u>
<u>CHAPTER 30</u>
<u>CHAPTER 31</u>

[CHAPTER 32](#)

[CHAPTER 33](#)

[CHAPTER 34](#)

[CHAPTER 35](#)

[CHAPTER 36](#)

[CHAPTER 37](#)

[AUTHOR'S NOTE](#)

[ACKNOWLEDGMENTS](#)

[ABOUT THE AUTHOR](#)

CHAPTER 1

DIANA

Paris, ten days ago

She used to be the golden girl. *How things have changed*, she thought, staring in the mirror. Her hair, once artfully streaked with sun-kissed highlights, was now what could only be described as dead-mouse brown. It was the most unobtrusive shade of hair color she could find on the shelves at the Monoprix, where she'd gone shopping after a neighbor mentioned that a man had been asking about her. That was the first clue that something might be amiss, that someone was asking about her, although there could have been a completely innocent explanation. He might have been an admirer, or a man trying to make a delivery, but she did not want to be caught unprepared, so she'd headed across town to a Monoprix in the third arrondissement, a neighborhood where no one knew her, and she'd bought hair color and eyeglasses. These were items she should always have kept on hand, but over the years she'd grown complacent. Careless.

She studied herself as a brunette and decided that the new hair color was not enough. She picked up scissors and began to cut, ravaging her €300 hairstyle by L'Atelier Blanc. Every snip of the scissors was like another slash to the fabric of her new life, a life she'd so carefully curated. As handful after handful of freshly cut hair slithered onto the bathroom tiles, she kept snipping, her regret soon turning to rage. Everything she'd planned, everything she'd risked, was now all for nothing, but that was the way of the world. No matter how clever you think you are, there is always someone cleverer, and that was her mistake: not considering the possibility that she could be outsmarted. For too many years, *she* had been the smartest person in the room, the one who was always two steps ahead and could outmaneuver anyone else on the team. The secret to success was to not let the rules get in your way, an approach that others didn't always appreciate. Yes, mistakes were occasionally made. Yes, blood was

sometimes unnecessarily spilled. She'd made enemies along the way, and some of her colleagues now despised her, but thanks to her efforts, the mission was always accomplished. That's what had made her the golden girl.

Until now. *Snip.*

She studied her reflection, this time with a cool and critical eye. In the ten minutes it had taken her to chop off her prized locks, she had gone through all the stages of grief for her lost life. Denial, anger, depression. Now she'd reached the stage of acceptance, and she was ready to move on, to shed the carcass of the old Diana and breathe into existence a new Diana. No longer the golden girl but someone seasoned by experience into tempered steel. She would survive this too.

She swept all her fallen hair into a trash bag and threw in the empty box of hair dye as well. She had no time to sterilize the place, so she'd leave behind traces galore of her presence here, but that could not be helped. She only hoped that the Paris police would rely on their typical sexist instincts to assume that the woman who'd lived in this apartment, the woman who was now missing, had been abducted. A victim, not a perpetrator.

She put on glasses and tousled her newly cropped hair into a messy swirl. It was merely a light disguise, but it should be enough to throw off any neighbors she might encounter on the way out. She tied off the trash bag and carried it out of the bathroom and into the bedroom, where she retrieved her go bag. What a shame she'd have to abandon all her beautiful shoes and dresses, but she needed to travel light, and leaving behind a closetful of designer fashions would make her disappearance look all the more involuntary. So would leaving behind the art she'd collected over the years, after her bank accounts had bloomed: the antique Chinese vases, the Chagall painting, the two-thousand-year-old Roman bust. She'd miss them all, but sacrifices had to be made if she was to survive.

Carrying her go bag and the trash bag with the hair clippings, she walked out of her bedroom and into the living room. There she gave another sigh of regret. Unsightly blood spatters stained her leather sofa and arced across the wall where the Chagall hung, like an abstract extension of the painting itself. Crumpled beneath the Chagall was the source of that blood. The man had been the first attacker through her door, so he was also the first one she'd dispatched. He was just your typical manly man whose hours at the gym had paid off in bulging biceps but not in brains. This was

not how he'd expected the day would end for him, and he'd died with a look of surprise on his face, probably never expecting it would be a woman to take him down.

He must have been badly informed about his target.

She heard a whisper of a breath behind her and turned to look at the second man. He lay at the edge of her precious Persian carpet, his blood seeping into the intricate pattern of vines and tulips. To her surprise, he was still alive.

She walked over to him and nudged his shoulder with her shoe.

His eyes flickered open. He stared up at her and fumbled for his weapon, but she'd already kicked it out of his reach, and all he could do was flap his hand on the floor like a dying fish splashing in its own blood.

"*Qui t'a envoyé?*" she asked.

His hand flapped more frantically. The bullet she'd fired into his neck must have damaged his spine, and his movements were spastic, his arm jerking robotically. Maybe he didn't understand French. She repeated her question, this time in Russian: *Who sent you?*

She didn't see any glint of comprehension in his eyes. Either he was fading too fast for his brain to function, or he did not understand, both of which made this worrisome. She could deal with the Russians, but if someone else had sent these men, that would present a problem.

"Who is trying to kill me?" she asked, this time in English. "Tell me, and I'll let you live."

His arm stopped flopping. He had fallen still, but she saw comprehension in his eyes. He'd understood the question. He also understood that it really didn't matter if he told her the truth; either way, he was a dead man.

She heard men's voices in the hallway outside her apartment. Had they sent others as backup? She'd delayed too long, and there was no time left to interrogate this one. She aimed her suppressor and fired two bullets into his head. *Nighty night.*

It took her only seconds to scramble out the window and onto the fire escape. Her last glimpse of her apartment was bittersweet. Here she'd found a measure of happiness and enjoyed the well-earned fruits of her labors. Now the place was a slaughterhouse, with the blood of two nameless men polluting her walls.

She dropped down from the fire escape into the alley below. At 11:00 p.m., the streets of Paris were still lively, and she easily slipped in among

the pedestrians strolling down the busy avenue. She heard a police siren in the distance, moving closer, but did not quicken her pace. It was too soon; the sirens had nothing to do with her.

Five blocks away, she tossed the trash bag into a restaurant dumpster and kept walking, the go bag slung over her shoulder. It held what she needed for the moment, and she was not without other resources. She had more than enough to start over.

But first, she had to find out who wanted her dead. Unfortunately, it was a multiple-choice question. She had assumed it was the Russians, but now she wasn't sure. When you piss off multiple factions, you end up with multiple enemies, each with his or her own talent for mayhem. The question was, how had her name been leaked? And why, after sixteen years, were they coming after her?

If they knew her name, then they must know about the others as well. The past, it seemed, was about to catch up with them all.

So much for a comfortable retirement. It was time to go back to work.

CHAPTER 2

MAGGIE

Purity, Maine, now

Something has died here.

I stand in my field, staring down at the evidence of slaughter in the snow. The killer dragged the victim through fresh powder, and even though snow continues to fall in a silent tumble of flakes, it has not yet covered the killer's tracks, or the grooves carved by the dead carcass as it was pulled toward the woods. I see a smear of blood and scattered feathers and clumps of black down trembling in the wind. It's what's left of one of my favorite Araucanas, which I prized for her reliable production of pretty blue eggs. Although death is merely a pinpoint in the larger circle of life, and I have seen it many times before, this particular loss hits me hard and I sigh, sending my breath swirling into the cold.

I glance through the chicken fence at what's left of my flock, which is now down to three dozen chickens, barely two-thirds of the original fifty chicks I nurtured last spring. It's been only two hours since I opened their coop door and released them for the day, and in that brief window of time, the predator moved in. I have one last rooster, the only one who's survived repeated eagle attacks and raccoon depredations, and he now struts the enclosure, all his tail feathers intact, looking unalarmed by the loss of yet another of his harem. What a useless cock.

So many of them are.

As I rise back to my feet, a flicker of movement catches my eye, and I stare at the woods looming beyond the chicken fence. The trees are mostly oak and maple, with a few sorry spruces struggling in the shade of their overpowering neighbors. Almost hidden in the underbrush is a pair of eyes, and they are watching me. For a moment we simply stare at each other, two enemies facing off across a snowy battlefield.

Slowly I move away from my mobile henhouse. I make no sudden

movements, utter no sound.

My enemy watches me the whole time.

Frozen grass crunches beneath my boots as I ease toward my Kubota RTV. Quietly I swing open the door and reach in for my rifle, which is tucked in behind the seats. It is always kept loaded, so I don't need to waste time scooping up ammo and sliding in bullets. I swing the barrel around, toward the trees, and take aim.

My shot cracks, loud as thunder. Startled crows rise from the trees and frantically flap into the sky, and my squawking chickens make a panicked dash for the safety of their henhouse. I lower the rifle and squint at the trees, scanning the underbrush.

Nothing moves.

I drive my RTV across the field to the edge of the woods and climb out. The underbrush is thick with brambles, and the snow hides a layer of dead leaves and dried twigs. Every step I take sets off an explosive snap. I have not yet spotted any blood, but I'm certain I will find it because you always know—somehow you can feel it in your bones—when your bullet hits its mark. At last I see the proof that my aim was true: a blood-spattered bed of leaves. The mangled carcass of my Araucana hen lies abandoned where the killer dropped it.

I wade deeper through the underbrush, pushing aside branches that snag my trousers and claw at my face. I know it is here somewhere, if not dead, then gravely injured. It has managed to flee farther than I expected, but I keep pushing ahead, the steam from my breath spiraling away. Once I could have sprinted through these woods, even with a heavy rucksack on my back, but I am not the woman I once was. My joints have been worn down by punishing use and the inexorable passage of time, and a hard landing from a parachute drop left me with a surgically pinned ankle that aches whenever the temperature drops or the barometer falls. My ankle is aching now. Aging is a cruel process. It has stiffened my knees, lacquered my once-black hair with silver, and deepened the grooves in my face. But my vision is still sharp, and I haven't lost my ability to read the landscape, to interpret the clues in the snow. I crouch down over a paw print and note the speckle of blood on the leaves.

The animal is suffering. That is my fault.

I haul myself back to my feet. My knees and hips protest, unlike the days when I could launch myself out of a cramped sports car and take off at a sprint. I tramp through a patch of blackberry bushes and emerge into a

clearing, and there I finally locate my nemesis, lying motionless in the snow. A female. She looks healthy and well nourished, and her thick fur is a lustrous red. Her mouth hangs open, revealing razor teeth and jaws powerful enough to slice into a chicken's throat and snap its neck. My bullet hit her squarely in the chest, and I am surprised she made it this far before she collapsed. I prod the body with my boot, just to confirm she's dead. While this particular problem has been solved, taking the fox's life gives me no sense of satisfaction. When I heave out a breath, my sigh is the sound of regret.

At sixty years old, I have amassed more than my share of them.

The fur is too valuable to abandon here in the woods, so I grab the fox by its tail. She's been eating well, dining on my chickens, and she's so heavy I have to half drag her out of the woods, her body carving a trench through dead leaves and snow. I lift her up and roll her into the bed of my Kubota, and the carcass lands with a sad thump. While I have no use for the pelt, I know someone who'll be delighted to have it.

I climb into the Kubota and drive across the field, to my neighbor's house.

*

Luther Yount likes his coffee burned, and I can smell it from his driveway as I climb out of the RTV. From here, I can see across the snow-covered field to my own farmhouse, which stands on a knoll beyond a colonnade of handsome sugar maples. Mine is not a grand house, but it's solid enough, built in 1830, according to the real estate agent who sold it to me. I know her information is correct, because I tracked down the original deed for Blackberry Farm. I believe only what I can confirm for myself. My home has unobstructed views in every direction, and if someone is approaching, I will see them, especially on a clear winter morning, when the landscape is stark and white.

I hear the lowing of a cow and the squawk of chickens. A set of small boot prints track through the snow, heading from Luther's cabin toward the barn. His fourteen-year-old granddaughter, Callie, must be in there, tending to her animals, as she does every morning.

I thump up the porch steps and knock. Luther opens the door, and I inhale the skunky scent of coffee that's been left too long on the stove. He fills the doorway, a white-bearded Santa in a red plaid shirt and suspenders, and he's wheezing from the woodsmoke and the perpetually

dusty state of his cabin.

“Why, good morning, Miss Maggie,” he says.

“Good morning. I’ve brought a gift for you and Callie.”

“What’s the occasion?”

“No occasion. I just thought you’d find some use for it. It’s in the Kubota.”

He doesn’t bother to pull on a coat, instead stepping outside in his wool shirt and blue jeans and bog boots. He follows me to the RTV and gives a murmur of admiration as he looks down at the dead fox and then strokes its fur.

“She’s a real beaut. So that’s the gunshot I heard this morning. You take her down with one bullet?”

“She still managed to run fifty yards into the woods.”

“She’s probably the same one who took out two of Callie’s hens. Good job.”

“Still, it’s a shame. The fox was just trying to make a living.”

“Aren’t we all?”

“I thought you could use the pelt.”

“You sure you don’t want to keep it? It’s a nice one.”

“And you’ll know exactly what to do with it.”

He reaches into the truck bed and hauls out the carcass. The effort makes him wheeze more loudly. “Come on in,” he says, cradling the dead animal like a grandchild. “I just poured myself some coffee.”

“Um, thanks. But no.”

“Then at least let me send you home with some fresh milk.”

That I definitely welcome. The milk from Callie’s grass-fed Jersey cow is unlike anything I’d tasted before I moved to Maine, rich and sweet enough to be worth the risk of drinking it unpasteurized. I follow him into his home, where he drops the fox carcass on a bench. The poorly insulated cabin is only marginally warmer inside than it is outside, even with the heat from the woodstove, so I leave my coat on, but Luther seems perfectly comfortable in just his shirt and jeans. I don’t want his coffee, but he sets two mugs on the kitchen table anyway. It would be rude to refuse the invitation.

I sit down.

Luther slides a pitcher of cream to me. He knows the way I like my coffee—or at least the only way I can tolerate his coffee—and he also knows I can’t resist the cream from Callie’s cow. In the two years since I

moved onto the adjoining property, he's no doubt gleaned a number of details about me. He knows that I turn off my lights every night around 10:00 p.m., that I'm up early to feed and water my chickens. He knows I'm a novice at tapping maple trees, that I mostly keep to myself, and that I don't throw loud parties. And today he's learned I'm a decent shot. There's still a lot about me that he doesn't know, things I've never told him. Things I will never tell him. I'm grateful he's not the kind of man who asks too many questions. I value a neighbor who's discreet.

I do know a great deal about Luther Yount, though. It's not hard to pick up the essence of the man just by looking around his home. His bookshelves are handmade, as is the rough-hewn kitchen table, and bundles of dried thyme and oregano, both cut from his home garden, hang from the overhead beam. He also has books—lots and lots of books, about a confoundingly wide range of subjects, from particle physics to animal husbandry. Some of the textbooks bear his name as author, evidence of Luther Yount's previous incarnation as a professor of mechanical engineering, before he resigned from the faculty of MIT. Before he left behind academics and the city of Boston, and perhaps a few personal demons as well, to remake himself as this disheveled but happy farmer. I know all this about him not because he's told me, but because I delved thoroughly into his background, as I did with all my nearby neighbors, before I bought Blackberry Farm.

Luther passed inspection. That's why I feel perfectly at ease sitting at his kitchen table and sipping his coffee.

Boots thump onto the porch, and the door swings open, admitting a blast of cold air along with fourteen-year-old Callie. Luther is homeschooling her, and as a result, Callie is charmingly feral in ways that make her both wiser yet more naive than other girls her age. Like her grandfather, she's serenely disheveled, her barn coat streaked with dirt and stray chicken feathers trapped in her brown hair. She carries in two baskets of freshly collected eggs, which she sets down on the kitchen counter. Her face is so flushed from the cold that her cheeks look as if they've been slapped.

"Hey, Maggie!" she says as she hangs up her coat.

"Look what she brought us," Luther says.

Callie looks at the dead fox lying on the bench and runs her hand across the fur. She shows no hesitation, no squeamishness. She's been living with Luther for most of her life, ever since her mother died of a