

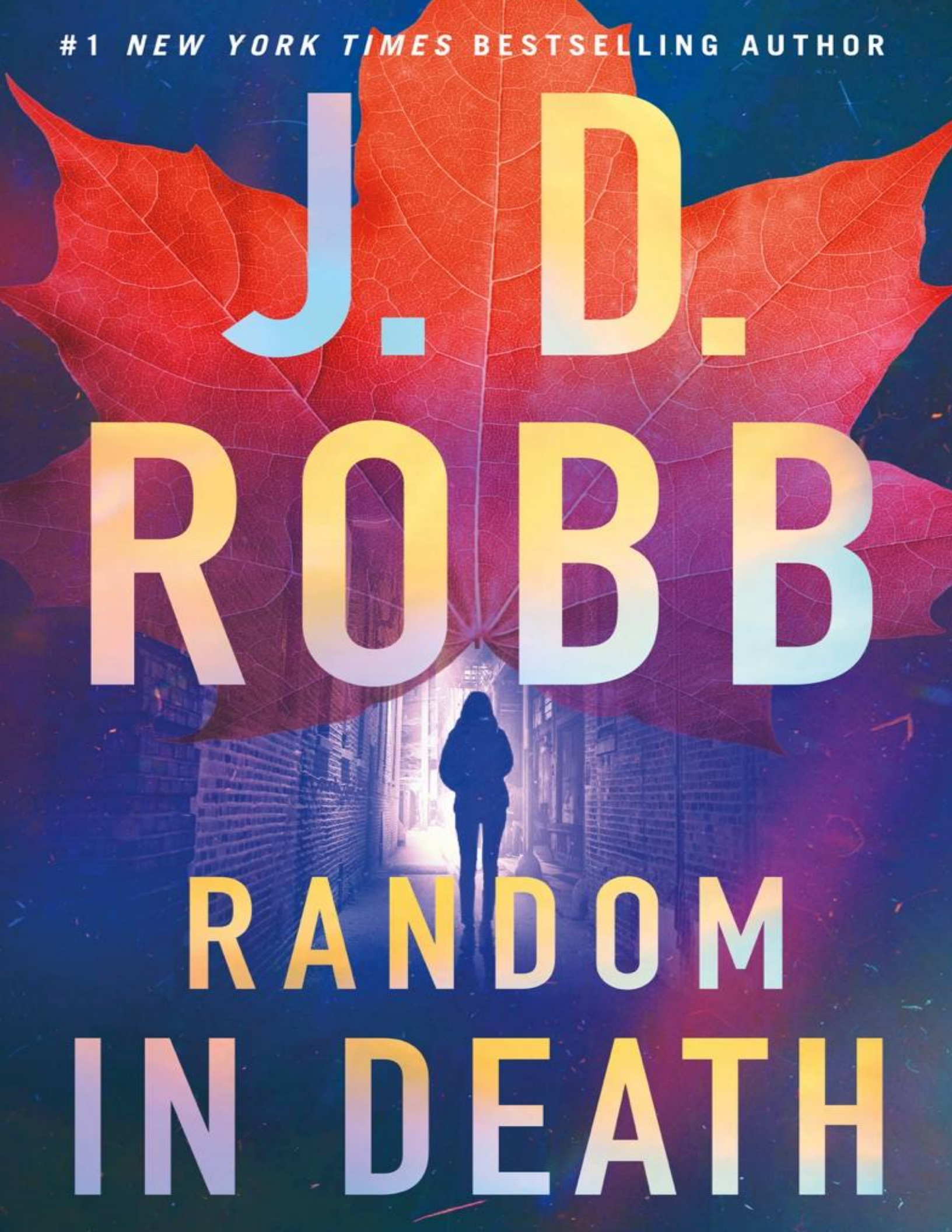
#1 *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR

J. D.

ROBB

RANDOM

IN DEATH



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**Bloody, bawdy villain!**

Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain!

—William Shakespeare

**To be choked with hate**

May well be of all evil chances chief.

—William Butler Yeats

## Prologue

*Gimme Avenue A 'cause they slay.*

Pleased with the rhythm in her head, Jenna Harbough rocked her hips to the beat.

*They may be old, but they rock and they roll.*

Probably they wouldn't like the "old" bit, but from her sixteen-year-old perspective, anyone heading toward, like, forty or whatever hit *old*.

I mean, jeez, even her parents liked their music. Which was why they'd agreed to let Jenna come, with her two besties, to the club to hear them live and in freaking person.

Avenue A played twice a year at Club Rock It, and for one night in the summer Rock It locked up the alcohol and opened the club to the under-twenty-one crowd.

Anyone who knew their music history was upon how back in the long-gone day, like in the 2040s (talk about old!), Avenue A had their first real gig at Club Rock It. So they paid that back twice a year, even though they were totally rock gods *EXTREME* who played for sold-out crowds in stadiums and huge concert halls.

Though she'd campaigned to go on this once-a-year night for three years, she'd gotten the absolute, no-way no. Until this time!

Now she danced with Leelee and Chelsea while Avenue A *slayed* with "Baby, Do Me Right."

And she danced close enough to the stage that she could see the sweat on Jake Kincade's face. For an old guy, he was still looking frosty extreme. Maybe because he was really tall. She liked the way the lights hit the blue streaks in his black hair—and how they sort of matched his eyes.

Dr-ream-y!

But more, she loved how his fingers just freaking flew over the guitar strings.

One day hers would do that. She knew she'd improved. She practiced every day, and knew, just *knew*, one day she'd stand onstage and slay the crowd with her music.

She had a demo disc in her purse. Her biggest dream of the night involved finding a way to get it into Jake Kincade's hands. She'd only put one song on it, the best she'd written, and she'd worked really hard on the demo.

Maybe it wasn't all studio slick and professional, but you had to start

somewhere. And the guys of Avenue A had been about her age when they really got going, so, maybe.

They segued into “It’s Always Now,” a classic crowd-pleaser, and more people swarmed the dance floor.

Jenna didn’t mind—the more the better. And she was so caught up in the music.

Then, just for a second, for one tiny second, Jake’s eyes met hers. He smiled; she died.

On a squeal, she grabbed Leelee’s hand.

“He looked at me!”

“What?”

Then she grabbed Chelsea’s hand as Jenna’s face flushed so deep she felt the heat in her toes. “Jake Kincade looked right at me. He smiled at me!”

“On the real?” Chelsea demanded.

“So on it! Holy shitfire!”

She bounced and bopped with her friends to the last song of the set.

“Me and a rock god locked eyes. We had a moment.”

“You’ve gotta find a way to get him your demo, Jenna. You totally smashed it,” Leelee assured her.

“Maybe I could— Ow!” When something stung her arm, she closed a hand over it. Some guy shot her a hard grin and the middle finger before he melted into the crowd.

“Asshole jabbed me!” Then forgot him and just danced.

“I’ve got to sit a minute,” she said when the song ended. “Make a plan, and— Whoa, I’m sort of floaty. That look!”

“I’m dying.” Chelsea put a hand on her throat, stuck out her tongue. “Need sweet, fizzy hydration.”

“Go, grab our seats, Jenna, and we’ll get drinks. We’ll help with the plan.”

“Solid.”

She felt a little woozy as she tried to get through to their tiny table. Floaty, she thought.

Then the heat came back, but like a million degrees. As she tried to breathe it away, she rubbed at her arm where it felt like a big, pissed-off hornet had taken a bite.

Need that sweet, fizzy hydration, she thought. But then her stomach cramped, and terrified she’d puke and humiliate herself, she tried to bolt to

the bathroom.

---

Jake swiped at sweat as the band's drummer, Mac, grinned at him. "We still got it, boss."

"Ain't never gonna lose it. I'm going out to catch some air. Jesus, you'd think Harve and Glo could get a decent temp control in here."

"And lose this ambiance?" Renn, keyboard, tossed Jake a tube of water.

"Thanks. Back in five."

He glanced out at the crowd as he had during the last song in the set, but still didn't see Nadine. Probably headed for the john—and good luck with that, he thought.

She earned big points for coming with him tonight. Rock It wasn't a dive or a dump, but as clubs went, it clung to its Alphabet City roots.

Never going to be fancy, never going upscale. And proud of it.

But his ace reporter, bestselling writer, fucking Oscar-winning lady had come on a night that remained important to him and his friends, his bandmates.

It reminded them of their roots, their beginnings. And just how far they'd come.

He made his way through the back of the house—such as it was—and slipped out the alley door.

And breathed.

Even in the sweltering summer of 2061, the air outside blew cooler than in.

He cracked the tube, drank deep.

He smelled the overstuffed recycler, but that didn't bother him. It, too, reminded him of his roots, the skinny, gangly kid from Avenue A who'd worked after school and weekends to save enough for his first guitar.

He'd written music when he should've been studying because the music had been first and last for him. Always.

He remembered busking in subway tunnels with Leon, then Leon and Renn, before they'd hit fifteen. And watching Mac play the drums at their high school's band concert. Then Art slid right in, and they became Avenue A.

Practicing in the storage room of the apartment building, then in Mac's uncle's garage.

Then fast-talking Harve into letting them play, just one gig, before they

were old enough to buy a beer.

That one gig turned into two weeks that summer, and ended with a recording contract.

So yeah, an important night to him. Avenue A had a lot of beginnings—that first guitar, Mac’s uncle letting his nephew bang away on an old drum set. His mom telling him to grab a dream and ride it.

A lot of beginnings, and Club Rock It ranked high.

He started to turn to the door, but it flew open. A girl stumbled out.

The kid had a mass of pink-tipped brown hair and wore a tiny black skirt with a midriff-baring red top. Her face was white as chalk, her big brown eyes glassy.

She said, “I got sick.”

“That’s okay, honey. It happens.”

Glo might have been vigilant about keeping the club alcohol and drug free on the underage nights, but kids found a way.

He sure as hell had.

“Let’s get you back inside. There’s a place you can sit down in the quiet, have some Sober-Up.”

“Not drunk. Can’t breathe right. He jabbed me! He jabbed me!”

Jake reached for her arm. Then her eyes rolled up white.

He caught her before she hit the pavement.

“Who jabbed you?” As he spoke, he noted her face wasn’t white but slightly blue. She shook with cold.

A needle mark, red and raw, stood out on her left biceps.

“Goddamn it. Jesus.” He yanked out his ’link as he lowered to the ground with her. Hit emergency. “I need an ambulance.” He rattled off the address while he checked the girl’s pulse.

Weak, he thought as he struggled not to panic. And getting weaker.

“You stay with me now. Look at me, okay? Look at me.”

For a moment her eyes fixed on him. But blindly.

“Come on now, hold on. Help’s coming. What’s your name, baby? Tell me your name.”

But he felt her go as he sat on the alley floor and cradled her in his arms.

Laying her down, he started CPR.

The alley door opened again. “Hey, Guitar Hero, Mac said— Oh my God, what happened?”

Nadine dropped down beside him.



“She’s not breathing. I can’t get her back. Her arm, look at her arm. She said someone jabbed her.”

“I’ll get an ambulance.”

“On the way. Her arm. Needle mark. Only junkies who can’t score a pressure syringe use needles. She’s not a junkie. Come on, kid, come back. Fucking come back.”

Beside him, Nadine looked at the needle mark, looked at the staring brown eyes of the girl on the ground.

She didn’t tell him to stop the CPR, but laid one hand on his back as she took out her ’link.

“Jake, I’m tagging Dallas.”

When he looked at Nadine, the despair simply covered him. “She’s just a kid.”

One, Nadine thought, who wouldn’t get any older.

# Chapter One

When Lieutenant Eve Dallas wasn't working a case, Saturday evenings often meant a vid, popcorn, and sex. With a Summerset-free house, as Roarke's major domo and the hitch in her stride had the night out with friends—whoever *they* were—the sex portion of the evening arrived early in the game room.

She'd bet Roarke she could beat him two out of three in pinball. She lost. Or did she?

In any case, after dinner on the patio, a walk through the gardens, sex in the game room, they settled down on the sofa, with the cat curled at their feet.

She had Roarke, popcorn, wine, and an action vid with plenty of bangs and booms to cap off a Saturday at home.

Knowing Roarke, she expected a second round of sex as an encore.

And that suited her just fine.

He talked now and then of adding a media room to the castle he'd built in the heart of New York City. But she liked this routine, stretched out or curled up together on the sofa in their bedroom sitting area with the cat purring in his sleep and her husband's excellent body warm against hers.

Her life had taken a radical turn when he'd walked into it, she thought. She'd never get all the way used to it. Before Roarke, her life had been the job, and the job had been her life.

Now she had two things she'd never expected, never looked for.

Love and a home.

And those two things, she'd come to realize, made her better at the job, better at running her division, better at standing for the dead.

At a pause in the action, he reached over for the bottle, topped off both their glasses.

"We're going through a lot of wine, pal."

"Safe and snug at home." The mists of Ireland wove through his voice. "Something I intend to take advantage of in a bit of time."

"Is that so? Freeze screen," she ordered, and rolled on top of him.

So ridiculously gorgeous, she thought, with the carved-by-benevolent-gods face, the sculpted mouth, the wildly blue eyes. "No time like the right now."

She took that sculpted mouth, slid her free hand into the mane of black that framed his face.

Roarke set his glass beside the bottle, then nipped hers out of her hand to do the same.

She laughed as he flipped her over, and with a grumble, Galahad slid off the couch.

Then his hands were on her, slipping under her baggy Saturday-at-home T-shirt. And as the kiss turned greedy, she felt her need, the wine, the moment tie together in a single perfect thrill.

Nipping at his jaw, she worked her hands between them to flip open the button of his jeans.

Her 'link signaled.

“Oh, come on!”

Roarke angled his head to read the display on her 'link. “It’s Nadine.”

“Fine. I’ll get back to her. Eventually.”

But when she started to pull him down again, he shook his head.

“Eve, how often does Nadine tag you on a Saturday night near to eleven?”

“Never. Shit. Damn it.”

When he eased away, she sat up, grabbed the 'link.

“Unless somebody’s dead, I—”

“She is. I’m sorry, Dallas, we need you. We’re at Club Rock It, the alley behind the club. Ah, it’s on Avenue A, but I don’t know the address.”

“Who is she?”

“I don’t know. A girl, teenage girl. Jake—they’re playing a special under-twenty-one thing. I came out—alley at the back—and he was doing CPR. He’d called an ambulance. The MTs just got here. He said she said someone jabbed her.”

Eve’s brown eyes went from mildly annoyed to cop flat. “She’s stabbed?”

“No, no, a needle mark, on her arm. Or maybe a really thin blade. It wasn’t really bleeding, but it looked raw.”

“Tell the MTs not to move the body. I’m calling it in, and uniforms will respond, secure the scene. I’m on my way.”

“Thanks,” Nadine began, but Eve cut her off.

She noted Roarke had brought out brown khakis and a jacket, a navy tank, boots, belt.

She didn’t complain about him picking out her clothes as she grabbed her communicator and called it in.

“You didn’t tell them to notify Peabody.”

Eve tugged the baggy summer Saturday shorts off long legs, pulled on the khakis. “No point screwing up her night until I know what it is.” She dragged on the tank, then shoved at her choppy brown hair. “Sorry it screwed up ours.”

“Lieutenant, it’s what we do. She sounded frazzled,” he added as he changed his shirt. “She rarely does.”

“Yeah, I caught that.”

She moved quickly, efficiently, a long, lean woman with an angular face, a shallow dent in the chin, and her mind on murder.

She pocketed her badge, then hooked on her weapon harness. “I’m not drunk, but—”

“A lot of wine, so Sober-Up all around.” He detoured into the bathroom, came out with a pill for each. “I’ll drive. I know the club.”

She sent him a look as she shrugged on her jacket. “Is it yours?”

“It’s not, no. But the building is. Ready?”

“Yeah.”

They went downstairs and out to the car he’d already remoted. Her DLE, she thought, in case she had to stay on the job.

In the passenger seat, she put the window down. The fresh air, especially at the speed he’d drive, would give the Sober-Up a solid kick start.

“It’s a club for teenagers?”

Roarke streaked down the driveway, through the gates.

“No. But every year, in the summer, Avenue A plays there one night for the teenage crowd. He told me about it just the other day. He gave a workshop at the school. Apparently, they had their first paying gig there when they were still of that age.

“They lock up all the alcohol,” he added before she could comment.

“Maybe. Who runs the club? I want to run them.”

“I don’t have those names in my head at the moment.”

“I’ll find them.”

Taking out her PPC, she got to work.

“Harvard Greenbaum and Glo Reiser. Harvard’s not a name, it’s a school. And what kind of name is Glo? Not seeing any criminal on Greenbaum, age sixty-three, New York native, married to Reiser for about twenty years, no offspring. She’s got a fifteen-year-old assault ding, charges dropped. Age sixty-one, also a native New Yorker.

“The club’s got a scatter of health department violations over the twenty-

odd years they've had it. All addressed. No citations for serving the underage. Not one."

"Jake said they're fierce about that issue."

Maybe, she thought again.

The Sober-Up and the air whipping through the open windows cleared her head and gave her a nagging yen for coffee. She used the in-dash AutoChef to program some for both of them.

"You wouldn't know the max capacity for this club, would you?"

"I wouldn't, but recalling the size of it, I wouldn't say over two hundred."

"Two hundred teenage suspects, great."

"Some of those would be staff, maybe some parents."

"We're going to need Child Services," she said, and pulled out her 'link. "Even if it looks like an accidental OD, we'll need someone. Two's better."

"Someone else is about to have their Saturday night screwed."

She spotted the cruiser and the ambulance in front of the club. Easy to recognize the club, she thought, as it had a rainbow sign lit up with the name, and music notes jumping around it.

"Just double it beside the cruiser."

"Loading zone just there," he said, and pulled into it. "I'll get your field kit."

She flipped on the On Duty light, got out to take a look at the club.

The graffiti on the old brick seemed purposeful. Guitars, drums, a bunch of figures crowded together. Dancing, she decided, and walked to the uniform stationed at the front door.

"Lieutenant," she said.

"Officer."

"No one's attempted to go in or come out since we arrived. The owner, apprised of the situation, is keeping things calm inside by having patrons join the band onstage, like an open mic. Mr. Kincade and Ms. Furst are still in the alley with the victim and the medicals. My partner is there."

"That works. I've notified Child Services to assist with any interviews involving minors. You can direct them to the alley."

"Yes, sir."

"Stand by, Officer."

Taking the field kit from Roarke, Eve walked around the building to the alley.

Halfway down, the medicals stood with the uniform. Nadine stood with

Jake, hands linked, a few feet away.

When Nadine spotted her, Eve held up a hand to keep her back.

“Stand by, Officer. What do we have?” Eve asked the MTs.

“Victim’s fifteen to seventeen years old. We didn’t go into her purse for her ID, Lieutenant, to keep the scene as clean as possible.”

“Appreciated.”

“Can’t give you a definite COD, but it looks like an OD. Got a blue tinge to her skin, and the needle mark’s fresh. But I suspect a used needle due to the redness around it. She doesn’t have any other visible marks. Looks to be a healthy weight, decent muscle tone. The ME’ll be able to give you a better picture.

“We responded at twenty-three-oh-four, and she was already gone. Jake, ah, Mr. Kincade was attempting CPR when we arrived. But she was gone.”

“All right. Again, I appreciate you preserving the scene as much as possible. I’ll take it from here.”

The second MT looked over at Jake. “You did everything you could.”

Eve looked down at the body. Five-three maybe, weighing a buck and some small change. Dressed for fun with a tiny, shiny bag worn cross-body.

Eve opened her kit to seal up. “Roarke, why don’t you take a walk with Jake and Nadine? Get them some coffee.” She looked at Jake—pale, his eyes full of grief and a hint of shock. “I’ll need to talk to you, both of you, but right now, I need to take care of her.”

“She just ... she just stumbled out the door, and—”

“I’m sorry this happened, Jake, but you need to leave her with me now.”

“Come on, Jake.” Nadine slid an arm around his waist. “We have to let Dallas do what she needs to do.”

When Roarke led them away, she crouched and carefully opened the little bag.

A mini ’link, lip stuff, her ID, a key card, a little cash, and a disc marked DEMO FOR JAKE KINCADE.

She thought: Well, shit.

“ID in the purse on the victim is for Jenna Harbough, age sixteen, mixed race. Brown and brown, five feet, three inches, a hundred and six pounds. Photo matches.”

Minus the pink tips in the brown hair, and the life in the big brown eyes.

After bagging the contents of the purse for Evidence, she took out her Identi-pad to make it official.

“Prints match.” She read the address into the record, and realized it had to be next door to their friends Charles and Louise. “Parents, Shane and Julia Harbough, younger sibling, male, Reed, age twelve.”

She took out her gauges. “Time of death, twenty-two-fifty-eight.”

After putting on microgoggles, she leaned down to get a good look at the wound on the arm.

“Somebody jabbed me, she said, and yeah, that sounds accurate. The wound on the arm’s fresh. It’s also puffy, inflamed. Potentially, she could have self-inflicted, but there are no works on her person and no signs of illegals abuse. ME to confirm.”

A boyfriend or girlfriend, maybe, who pressured her into trying something new? A rebellious, youthful impulse that went terribly wrong?

*He jabbed me.*

Or something else.

Gently, she turned the body, found no visible wounds.

Sitting back on her heels, she took out her ’link, tagged Peabody. Then straightening up, contacted the morgue, the sweepers.

“Have you been inside, Officer?”

“Yes, Lieutenant, briefly.”

“An estimate of how many are in there?”

“Well, sir, it’s packed. Gotta be a couple hundred.”

“Okay. I need you to stand by here until the dead wagon comes to transport the victim. And the sweepers arrive to process this scene. After that, I’m likely to need you and your partner inside to help with crowd control.”

“Yes, sir. It’s a damn shame, Lieutenant. I’ve got a grandkid about her age. You hate to see a kid. I’ll look out for her until they come to take her.”

Since she wanted to interview Jake next, Eve walked back down the alley. She saw him with Nadine and Roarke standing by her vehicle. She stopped to give the second uniform instructions, then walked down.

“Nadine, how about you walk around the block with Roarke?”

“I don’t want to—”

“I need to talk to Jake. Just Jake. Then I need to talk to you. Just you.”

Nadine opened her mouth, then on a nod closed it again. She turned to Jake, lifted onto her toes, and kissed him.

As Roarke led Nadine away, Jake turned to Eve. “She thinks I’m going to fall apart, and she’s not far wrong. I couldn’t get her back, the girl.”

“Did you know her?”

“No. I saw her. I realized I’d seen her out on the floor, dancing. Right before the end of the set. She looked so happy.”

“You’d never seen her before tonight?”

“No.”

“Her name’s Jenna Harbough. Is that familiar?”

“No. Jenna.” He repeated it, softly, then pressed his fingers to his eyes.

If you took away the misery, he looked like the rock star he was. Faded jeans and black high-tops, black tee that showed off a damn good build, the careless mop of dark, blue-tipped hair.

But his misery hung in the air around him like a haze.

“I went out for some air. It’s frigging hot in the club. We were taking a fifteen-minute break between sets, so I went out, chugged down some water, got some air. And she stumbled out the alley door.”

“Stumbled?”

“Yeah.”

Eve heard him breathe in—the sound of a man steadying himself.

“She just sort of tripped out, you know? She said she’d been sick, and I figured she’d found a way to get some booze in. Glo’s got a hawk eye there, but you have to figure some will find a way if they want to bad enough. I guess she looked a little drunk because I figured she was. I was going to take her back inside, into the office, get Harve or Glo. They’d be pissed at her, but they’d take care of her, call her parents, whatever.”

He closed his eyes, and Eve let him have the silence. He was telling her what she needed to know without her asking.

“I didn’t notice the needle mark right away, I guess because I was looking at her face. She was so pale—but then she said, ‘He jabbed me. He jabbed me.’ Twice, like that. And I saw the mark, I saw she wasn’t white so much as that faint blue?”

“Yeah.”

“Yeah.” Now he passed a hand over his face. “I’d seen that before. On tour, one of the roadies. They brought him back, they got him in time and brought him back. But she just started to go down. I caught her before she hit. Her pulse was barely there, and she just ... I called for an ambulance, but ...

“I’ve never seen anyone die before, just ... leave. I was holding her, talking to her, trying to get her to talk to me, tell me her name. Anything to keep her here. And she died. I could see it, but I thought, CPR. She’s young, she’ll come back, and the MTs are coming. Nadine came out looking for me,



and when she said we needed Dallas, I knew the girl—Jenna—wasn't going to come back. Maybe if I'd—"

"Jake, what you just ran through for me couldn't have taken more than two or three minutes."

"Yeah, it was only a couple minutes. Felt longer," he murmured. "But yeah, it was so damn fast."

"I'm going to repeat what the MT told you, and you should listen because we deal with this every day. You did all you could do."

His eyes met hers. Not the wild blue of Roarke's, but a deeper blue now drenched in sorrow. "It doesn't feel like it."

"Do people—fans, groupies, like that—ever send or give you demo discs?"

He smiled a little. "Oh yeah. Why?"

"Something I need to look into. Can you tell me when you went outside, about what time?"

"I can tell you because I checked to make sure I got back before the fifteen was up. It was ten-fifty-five. We had one more short set before we closed out at midnight. We could go over a little, but when we're doing these, we try to hit last number at midnight. Kids have curfews."

"Right." She saw Roarke and Nadine coming around the corner. "I need you to come into Central tomorrow, to follow up. Let's make it ten."

"Okay, sure. Listen, does she have family? I know you can't tell me specifics, but—"

"Yes. I'll notify them tonight."

He closed his eyes again. "If they want to talk to me—I was with her when..."

"I'll let them know. It's your turn to take that walk."

"All right. Dallas, what she said? If somebody did this to her—"

"It's my job to find out. One more time around," she said to Roarke, then turned to Nadine.

"I've never seen him like this. He's always in control. I need to get him away from here, Dallas."

"Then let's make this quick. What time did the band break?"

"Oh, I don't know, just before eleven, I think. I knew the break was coming, so I made a dash to the ladies' before a hundred teenage girls had the same idea. When I came out, I looked for Jake, and Renn said he'd gone out to the alley. So I went out. I saw Jake doing CPR on the girl. I was going to

call for the MTs, but he said he had. And, Dallas, I could see it was too late. He was trying so hard to save her, but she was gone. And I said I was going to tag you.

“And he looked at me when I did.” Taking a breath, Nadine dashed a tear away. “And he looked at me as if I’d broken his heart.

“You can’t suspect him of doing something to that girl. You know—”

“I don’t, but at the same time, there’s a procedure that has to be followed to clear him of any suspicion. You know that.”

Nadine swiped at another tear, this time impatiently. “It’s different when it’s your person. You know that. And I know you,” she added. “So I know you’ll find out who did this to that poor girl.”

“At this time, I can’t conclusively say anyone did it to her.”

Nadine pushed a hand at her streaky blond hair, gave Eve one long look with those shrewd green eyes. “You can’t say it, but you know it.”

“And you know the fact that Jake Kincade and Nadine Furst were in an alley with a dead minor female is going to explode all over the media.”

Nadine set a hand on the hip of a pair of tight black jeans. “I’m a freaking reporter on the crime beat, so I know that very well. Only another reason I want to get him the hell away from here. We’ll handle it.”

“No interviews unless I clear it.”

It took only that for Nadine to look and sound more like herself. “You have heard of a little constitutional amendment we call the first?”

“If someone did this to her, wouldn’t it just bring on a happy dance if they found their ugly little deed all over the celebrity gossip channels? Her name was Jenna. Let’s keep her and your person away from that until we can’t.”

“You’re right, and I wasn’t going to do interviews. I just don’t like being told I can’t. Here they come. Roarke’s a goddamn rock, Dallas.”

“I know that, too. Take Jake home. He’s coming in tomorrow morning for a follow-up. With some luck and Morris, I’ll have a COD by then.”

She glanced back at the club. “And with a shitload of luck, maybe a suspect tonight.”

“What about the rest of the band? He’ll want to know. They’re family.”

“I need to talk to them, then they can go. It’s a process, Nadine. And there’s Peabody with McNab. Take Jake home,” she repeated, and headed in the opposite direction to meet her partner and her partner’s person.

In his striped baggies and neon-pink tee, Detective McNab, one of the

Electronic Detectives Division's stars, looked like he should be riding a unicycle and juggling.

His earlobe glittered with studs and tiny hoops; the tail of his long blond hair swung as he pranced her way.

Peabody clumped in her pink boots. She may have worn more sedate black trousers and quietly pink shirt, but she still sported those red streaks through her dark, and currently all flippy, hair.

"We've got a dead teenage girl in the alley waiting for the dead wagon. Inside," Eve continued, "we've probably got a hundred or more teenagers currently being stalled by the rest of Avenue A. There may be closer to two hundred with staff, any parents or guardians."

"How's Jake?" Peabody asked.

"He's holding up. We've got to start carving through the people inside, releasing them—and Child Services hasn't shown up yet. The victim's parents need to be notified. I have to take that now. Peabody, tag CS again, and tell them to get somebody's ass over here or I will fry any number of asses. Until that ass or asses are here to represent the rights of the minors, stick with adults, or with minors in the company of a parent or guardian.

"McNab, talk to the band, get times, locations. They took a break about twenty-two-fifty-five. Get the security feeds, front and back."

She described the victim and what she wore. "See if anyone saw her, saw anything. I'll be back as soon as I can."

She walked back to Roarke. "Appreciate you circling the block like that."

"It's a lovely night for a walk, if an ugly reason to need one."

"It's going to be a really ugly night for the victim's parents. I'm going to go do the notification."

"Without Peabody?"

"I can't spare her for this when we have all those potential wits and suspects in that club. Look, I don't know how long we'll be at this so—"

"You're about to go tell a mother and father their child's dead." He took her field kit to put it in the trunk. "I'm with you, Lieutenant."

He closed the trunk. "Have you run them?"

"Not yet."

"Why don't I drive while you do that?"

She paused to breathe, to let the night air blow away some hard.

"That works. They live next door to Charles and Louise."

"Do they now?" he murmured. "Whenever you marvel how big the world

is, it reminds you how small it can be. Odds are they know each other.”

“Yeah.” She slid in the car. “Odds are. The victim had a disc in her purse. It was labeled. Demo disc for Jake Kincade.”

“Ah well. Did you tell him?”

“No, it’s need to know right now until I check it. I ran him through did you know her, have contact, recognize her name. All no. He said he saw her on the floor during the last song before they broke, dancing. I believed him. I’d have believed him even if I didn’t know him. Plus, the timing’s going to check out, which means he couldn’t have stuck a needle in her arm, if he’d somehow hidden the fact from someone like Nadine, from me, from you that he’s a vicious teenage girl killer.”

“But it concerns you.”

“It’s a complication, a possible connection between Jake and the victim. His story rings true, and again it would even if I didn’t know him. Add the timing. But it’s a complication.”

One she needed to unravel.

But first she had to forever change the world and the lives of three people.

They drove into the quiet Lower West Side neighborhood with its dignified brownstones and summer-green trees. She noted a couple of lights on in the house Charles and Louise shared. At least twice as many glowed in the Harbough residence.

Waiting up for their daughter, she thought. Probably checking the time, anticipating. She knew parents worried—she’d met enough of them—and some imagined the worst.

But none believed the worst until it came knocking on their door.

“She’s a doctor,” Eve told Roarke, “so that ups the odds she knows Louise. He’s an exec at a Wall Street firm, heads his own division. They’re twenty years into the marriage. She has an assault charge—she’d have been about her daughter’s age. Unsealed at her request.”

As she spoke, Eve got out of the car to stand on the sidewalk and study the house.

“She punched a guy picketing a woman’s health clinic when he tried to bar her and her mother from going in.”

They walked to the door flanked by carriage lights that gleamed.

Solid security, Eve noted as a matter of habit, and thought of the key card she’d bagged that Jenna Harbough would never use again.

She rang the bell, and felt Roarke’s hand press briefly against her back in