



THE
NEW
COUPLE
IN 5B

A novel

New York Times Bestselling Author of
SECLUDED CABIN SLEEPS SIX

LISA UNGER

THE
NEW
COUPLE
IN 5B

A Novel

New York Times Bestselling Author of
SECLUDED CABIN SLEEPS SIX

LISA UNGER

Praise for *The New Couple in 5B*

“If *The Shining*’s Overlook Hotel were a luxury apartment building, it might resemble the Windermere. I was terrified.”

—Ana Reyes, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The House in the Pines*

“The tension just keeps building in Unger’s latest dark and twisty delight. I loved it.”

—Joshilyn Jackson, *New York Times* bestselling author of *With My Little Eye*

“Lisa Unger keeps finding new ways to prove she’s among the best in the business. Packed with heart, tension, and fever-dream fear, *The New Couple in 5B* delivers domestic suspense with a gleaming Gothic edge.”

—Michael Koryta, *New York Times* bestselling author of *An Honest Man*

“Dark, atmospheric, and addictive from the first page right up until the shocking ending. An absolutely riveting read.”

—Jennifer Hillier, *USA TODAY* bestselling author of *Things We Do in the Dark*

“A nail-biting domestic suspense novel with a ghostly edge worthy of Du Maurier. This one screams. I read it in a single sitting.”

—Gregg Hurwitz, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Lone Wolf*

“Lisa Unger creates the perfect creepy setting for this superb psychological thriller, which is beautifully crafted and deliciously unsettling.”

—Clare Mackintosh, *New York Times* bestselling author of *A Game of Lies*

LISA UNGER is a *New York Times* bestselling and award-winning author. Her books have been published in over thirty languages and have been voted “Best of the Year” or top picks by the Today show, *Good Morning America*, *Entertainment Weekly* and others. Her nonfiction work has appeared in the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, NPR and *Travel + Leisure*. Lisa lives on the west coast of Florida with her family.

LisaUnger.com

X: [@LisaUnger](https://twitter.com/LisaUnger)

Instagram: [@LAUnger](https://www.instagram.com/LAUnger)

[Facebook.com/AuthorLisaUnger](https://www.facebook.com/AuthorLisaUnger)

The New Couple in 5B

Lisa Unger



*In loving memory of my uncle Frederick Davidson,
who was a true Renaissance man, ever at work on his epic poem, my aunt
Phyllis Davidson, who epitomized the glamour of New York City for me, and
for my uncle Mario Miscione, a loving and devoted family man.*

Contents

Overture

Act I

One

Two

Three

Four

Five

Six

Seven

Act II

Eight

Nine

Ten

Eleven

Twelve

Thirteen

Fourteen

Fifteen

Sixteen

[Seventeen](#)

[Eighteen](#)

[Nineteen](#)

[Twenty](#)

[Twenty-One](#)

[Twenty-Two](#)

[Twenty-Three](#)

[Twenty-Four](#)

[Act III](#)

[Twenty-Five](#)

[Twenty-Six](#)

[Twenty-Seven](#)

[Twenty-Eight](#)

[Twenty-Nine](#)

[Thirty](#)

[Thirty-One](#)

[Thirty-Two](#)

[Thirty-Three](#)

[Thirty-Four](#)

[Thirty-Five](#)

[Thirty-Six](#)

[Thirty-Seven](#)

[Thirty-Eight](#)

[Thirty-Nine](#)

[Act IV](#)

[Forty](#)

[Forty-One](#)

[Forty-Two](#)

[Forty-Three](#)

[Six Months Later](#)

[Forty-Four](#)

[Forty-Five](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

overture

You. Standing on solid ground, reaching. Me. On the ledge, looking down. All around me, stars. Stars in the sky, the city a field of glittering, distant celestial bodies. Each light a life. Each life a doorway, a possibility. That's the thing I've always loved about my work, the way I can disappear into someone else. I shed myself daily, slipping into other skins. Some of them more comfortable than my own.

"Don't," you say. "Don't do this. It doesn't have to be this way."

I hear all the notes of desperation and fear that sing discordant and wild, a cacophony in my own heart. And I think that maybe you're wrong. Maybe everything I am and everything I've done, has led me here to this teetering edge. There was no other possible ending. No other way.

Sirens. As distant and faint as birdsong. It seems as if, in this city, they never stop wailing, someone always on their way to this emergency or that crisis. Rushing to help or stop or save. From the outside, it seems like chaos. But when you are inside, it's quiet, isn't it? Just another moment. Only this time the worst thing is about to happen, or might, or might not, to us. Every flicker of light, every passing second, just a shift of weight and another outcome becomes real.

"Please." Under the fear, the pleading of your tone, I hear it—hope. You're still hopeful. Still holding on to those other possibilities.

But when I look at you now, I know—and you know it, too, don't you?—that I've made too many dark choices, that there is no outcome but this one. The one that sets us both free right here and right now.

Pounding. They're at the door.

You know what's funny? Even on that day we first met, I knew it would end like this. Not really. Not exactly this, not a premonition, or a vision of the future. But even in the light you shined on me, even as you made me be the person I always wanted to be, there was this dark entity hovering, a specter. The destroyer. You were always too good for me, and I knew I could never hold on to the things we would build together.

Sounds rise and converge—your voice, their pounding, that wailing, the endless honking and whirl of movement from this place we have lived in and

loved.

The weight of my body, I close my eyes and feel it. The beating of my heart, the rise and fall of my breath. I tilt and wobble on the edge, as you move closer, hands outstretched.

“We’ll be okay,” you whisper. At least I think that’s what you say. I can hardly hear you over all the noise. Your eyes, like the city below me, a swirling galaxy of lights.

You’re close now, hand reaching.

Just one step forward or backward.

Which one?

Which one, my love?

ACT I

the inheritance

Look like the innocent flower,
but be the serpent under it.

William Shakespeare
Macbeth, Act 1, Scene 5

one

Sometimes the smallest things are the biggest.

Like the slim rectangular box that sits at the bottom of my tote. Maybe just six inches long and two inches wide. Light, flimsy, its contents clatter when shaken. But it's a whispering presence, a white noise buzzing in my consciousness.

Max, dapper in a houndstooth blazer and thin camel cashmere sweater, peers at the oversize menu, considering. As if he isn't going to order the penne ala vodka and salad he always does. I hold mine, as well, perusing my options. As if I'm *not* going to get the pizza margherita, no salad. The tony Italian restaurant on Broadway across from my publisher's office is packed, silverware clinking, conversations a low hum. Lots of business being done over sparkling waters and tuna tartare.

Outside the big picture window, beside which we sit, the river of traffic flows, horns and hissing buses, the screech of brakes, the occasional shout from annoyed drivers. Beneath all of that, I feel it, the presence of that slim box, so full of possibility.

The waitress takes our expected orders, deposits Max's usual bottle of Pellegrino. I'm a tap water girl, but he pours me a glass, always the gentleman. I note his manicured nails, buffed and square, the white face of his Patek Philippe. No smartwatch for him. Max appreciates timepieces for their elegant union of form and function.

"So," he says, placing the green bottle on the white tablecloth.

I don't love the sound of that word. Max and I have known each other a long time. There's a heaviness to it, a caution.

"So?"

"Your proposal."

That's why we've met for lunch, to discuss the proposal I've submitted for my new book.

He slips my proposal out of the slim leather folder he's laid on the table between us.

"There's a lot to like here."

That's publishing code for *I don't like it*. How many times did I say the

same thing to authors I was editing?

I have always been a writer, scribbling in the nooks and crannies of my days, my foray into publishing just a stop on the road to the writing life. But Max never wanted to be anything else more than an editor, the one who helped talented writers do their best work.

“But?” I venture. He lifts his eyebrows, clears his throat.

Max and I met when we were both editorial assistants, fresh out of the Columbia Publishing Course. We were so eager to enter the world of letters, literature geeks seduced by what we imagined was the glitz and glamour of the industry. He climbed the corporate ladder, while I stayed up late, got up early, holed up on weekends to complete my first book.

By the time I had finished my first draft, Max was a young star editor at one of the biggest publishing companies in New York, the first person I asked to read my manuscript; he was the first person to say he believed in me, the first editor to buy something I’d written and to make me what I’d always wanted to be. A full-time writer.

He runs a hand through lustrous dark hair, which he wears a little long, takes off his tortoiseshell glasses. “I don’t know, Rosie. There’s just something—lacking.”

I feel myself bristle—lacking? But underneath the crackling of my ego, I think I know he’s right. The truth is—I’m not *that* excited about it. The belly of fire that you need to complete a project of this size, honestly, it’s just not there.

“There was so much fire in the first one,” says Max, holding me in the intensity of his gaze. He’s so into this—his job, this process. “There were so many layers—the justice system, the misogyny in crime reporting, the voices of the children. It really grabbed me, even in the proposal you submitted. I could see it. It was fresh, exciting.”

“And this isn’t.” I try and probably fail to keep the disappointment out of my voice.

He leans in, reaches a hand across the table. “It *is*. It’s just not *as* exciting. The first book, it was a success, a place from where we can grow. But the next book *needs to be* bigger, better.”

Bigger. Better. What’s next? That’s the mantra of the publishing industry.

“No pressure,” I say, blowing out a laugh.

My first true-crime book was about the violent rape of a young Manhattan woman, the travesty of justice that followed where a man was wrongly

convicted and the real criminal went free, then continued on to rape and kill three more women. It took me five years to research and write while working a full-time job as an editor. The book did well, not a runaway bestseller but a success by any measure. The moment was right for that book, post *Me Too*, where society was casting a new light on women wronged by men, looking at older stories through fresh eyes.

It's been a year since the book came out, the paperback about to release soon. I can't take five years to write another one.

Max puts a gentle hand on mine. His touch is warm and ignites memories it shouldn't. His fingers graze my wedding and engagement rings, and he draws his hand back, steeples his fingers.

"Is this *really* what you want to be writing?"

"Yes," I say weakly. "I think so."

"Look," he says, putting his glasses back on. "You've had a lot on your plate."

I'm about to protest but it's true. My husband, Chad, and I had been taking care of Chad's elderly uncle Ivan, who recently passed away. Between being there for Ivan, Chad's only family, in the final stages of his illness, and now managing his affairs, it's been a lot. Scary to watch someone you love die, so sad, sifting through the detritus now of his long and colorful life. Uncle Ivan—he was all we had. I've been estranged from my family for over a decade. His loss feels heavy, something we're carrying on our shoulders. With the temperature dropping and the holidays approaching, there's a kind of persistent sadness we're both struggling under. Maybe it has affected my work more than I realized.

I think of that box in the bottom of my bag, that little ray of light. I am seized with the sudden urge to go home and tear it open.

"Look," he says when I stay quiet. "Just take some time to think about it, go deeper. Ask yourself, 'Is this the story I really want and need to tell? Is it something people need to read?' Make *me* excited about it, too. We have time."

We don't, actually.

The money from the first book—it's running out. Chad has a low-paying gig in an off-off Broadway production. This city—it takes everything to live here. Our rent just went up and we need to decide whether or not we can afford to renew the lease. It's just a one-bedroom, five-story walk-up in the East Village, and we're about to be priced out unless one of us gets paid a

significant sum. Chad has an audition for another better-paying job, but things are so competitive, there's no way to know if he even has a chance. It's just a commercial, not something he's excited about, but we need the cash.

Today he's at the reading of Ivan's will. But we don't expect to inherit anything. Ivan died penniless. His only asset the apartment that will go to his daughter Dana.

Did I rush the proposal because I'm feeling desperate? Maybe.

The waitress brings our meal and I'm suddenly ravenous. We dig in. The pizza is good, gooey and cheesy. The silence between us, it's easy, companionable, no tension even though it's not the conversation I was hoping to have. Writers, we only want to hear how dazzling we are. Everything else hurts a little.

"You said there was a lot to like," I say, mouth full. "What *do* you like about it? Give me a jumping-off point to dive deeper."

"I really like the occult stuff," he says, shoving a big bite of penne into his mouth. It's one of the things I love most about Max, his passion for good food. Chad is so careful about everything he eats, either losing or gaining weight for a role. "You kind of glossed over that."

I frown at him. "I thought you didn't like ghost stories."

There were several supernatural elements to my last book—the little girl who dreamed about her mother's death the day before it happened, how one of the children believed he communicated with his murdered sister through a medium. Both of those bits wound up on the cutting-room floor. *Too woo-woo*, according to Max. *Let's stay grounded in the real world.*

"I *don't* like ghost stories—per se," he says now. "But I like all the reasons why people *think* a place is haunted. I like what it says about people, about places, about mythology."

I feel a little buzz of excitement then. And that's why every writer needs a good editor.

The proposal is about an iconic Manhattan apartment building on Park Avenue that has been home to famous residents including a bestselling novelist, a celebrated sculptor and a young stage and screen star. It's also had far more than its fair share of dark events—grisly murders, suicides and terrible accidents. It's a New York story, really—the history of the building, its unique architecture, how it was built on the site of an old church that burned down. I want to focus on each of the crimes, the current colorful cast

of characters that resides there, and tell the stories of the people who died there—including Chad’s late uncle Ivan, a renowned war photographer.

I’ll still have access to the building, even though we’re almost done cleaning out Ivan’s things. His daughter, from whom Ivan hadn’t heard in years, even as he lay dying and Chad tried to call again and again, is now circling her inheritance. She wasn’t interested in Ivan, or his final days, his meager possessions. But the apartment—it’s worth a fortune. Anyway, I’ve befriended the doorman, Abi. He is a wealth of knowledge, having worked in the building for decades. I think he’s long past retirement age but doesn’t seem to have any plans to hang up his doorman’s uniform. *Some folks don’t get to leave the Windermere, Miss Rosie*, he joked when I asked him how much longer he planned to work. *Some of us are destined to die here*.

“And I like the crimes,” Max says, rubbing thoughtfully at his chin. “So I think if we can tease some of those elements out, I can take it to the editorial meeting.”

The truth is I’m more excited about revising the proposal than I was about writing the book when I walked in here. He’s right. It’s not the architecture, the history of the building—it’s the darkness, the crimes, the people. The question—are there cursed or haunted places, some energy that encourages dark happenings? Or is it just broken people doing horrible things to each other? A mystery. That’s what makes a great story. And story is king, even in nonfiction.

“I’ll get right to work,” I say. “Thanks, Max.”

“That’s what editors are for, to help writers find their way to their best book.” He looks pleased with himself. “Now, what’s for dessert?”

Outside, a loud screech of tires on asphalt draws my attention to the street just in time to see a bike messenger hit by a taxi. In a horrible crunching of metal and glass, the biker hits the hood. His long, lanky limbs flailing, flightless wings, he crashes into the windshield, shattering it into spider webs, then comes to land hard, crooked on the sidewalk right in front of the window beside us. I let out an alarmed cry as blood sprays on the glass, red-black and viscous.

Max and I both jump to our feet. I find myself pressing against the bloody glass as if I can get through it to the injured man. I’m fixated on him, then remembering Ivan, those last shuddering breaths he took.

The biker’s eyes, a shattering green, stare. His right leg and left arm are twisted at an unnatural angle, as if there’s some unseen hand wrenching his

body. I reach for my phone, but Max is already on his. *We've witnessed an accident, on Broadway between Fifty-Fifth and Fifty-Sixth, outside Serafina. A man is badly injured.*

He's dead, I want to correct him. But I don't. Once you've seen the look of death, you recognize it right away. It's a kind of vacancy, a light lost, something fled. Those green eyes are empty, beyond sight. A stylish young woman in a long black coat and high heels runs up to the twisted form and drops to her knees while she's talking on the phone.

She puts a tender hand to his throat, checking expertly for a pulse. Then, she starts to scream. Her screaming, so helpless, so despairing—does she know him? *Help. Help. Somebody help him.* Or does she, too, recognize that look? Does it connect her as it does me to every loss she's ever known?

I'm still pressing against the glass, transfixed.

A crowd gathers, blocking the man from sight. In minutes, an ambulance arrives. There's a frenzy of angry honking horns, people frustrated that their trips have been delayed by yet another accident. Max moves over to me, puts a strong arm around my shoulders.

"Are you okay? Rosie, say something."

I realize then that I'm weeping. Fat tears pouring down my cheeks. Turning away from the scene on the street, and into Max's arms, I let him hold me a moment. I take comfort in his familiar scent, the feel of him.

"I'm okay," I say, pulling away finally.

"You sure?" he says, face a mask of concern. "That was—awful."

We sit back down in stunned silence. Time seems to warp. Finally, the man is shuttled away in an ambulance, and the crowd disperses. We're still at our lunch table, helpless to do or change anything. How long did it all take? Someone from the restaurant steps outside, dumps a bucket of soapy water over the blood that has pooled there. Then he uses a squeegee to wash the blood from the window right next to me but instead just smears it in a hideous, wide, red swath.

I get up quickly, almost knocking over my chair. The rest of the diners have gone back to their meals. The show is over; everyone returns quickly to their lives. As it should be, maybe. But I am shaken to my core. So much blood. I feel sick.

"I have to get out of here. I'm sorry."

Max rises, too. He tells the hostess he'll come back for the bill, then shuttles me outside and hails a cab. The traffic is flowing again, and one pulls

up right away.

“You’re so pale,” Max says again, opening the door. He presses a hand on my shoulder. “Let me pay the bill and run you home?”

“No, no,” I protest, embarrassed to be so rattled. “It’s fine.”

I just can’t stop shaking.

“Call me when you get in,” he says. “Let me know you got home safe.”

Then I’m alone in the back of the cab, the driver just a set of eyes in the rearview mirror, city noise muffled, Max’s worried form growing small behind me. My pulse is racing and my mind spinning.

What just happened? What *was* that?

An accident. One of hundreds that happen in this city every single day. I just happen to have been unlucky enough to witness it.

My father would surely declare it an omen of dark things to come. But he and I don’t share the same belief system. I haven’t spoken to him in years; amazing that I still hear his voice so clearly.

The cab races through traffic, dodging, weaving, the cabbie leaning on his horn. I dig through my tote and find the little white, blue and purple box, pull it out so that I can put my eyes on it. A pregnancy test.

In the face of death and loss, what do we need most?

Hope.

Life.

I can’t get home fast enough.

two

I let myself in through the heavy grated metal street door, check the mail, which contains only bills and useless fliers. Then I walk up the five stories to our apartment. I'm still a bit shaky, but the bike messenger accident is already fading some.

I guess that makes me a real New Yorker, now indifferent to the misery of others. New York City, as much as I love it, is an assault, a daily punch in the face. You do have to shut down a bit to survive its noise, odors, catcalls, lurking predators, its violence. I find myself revising the event. It wasn't that bad. Maybe he was just stunned, not dead. He'll be injured, of course, but ultimately live to messenger another day. Right? Right.

By the time I've reached the fifth floor, I almost believe it. I unlock our apartment door and push inside. I am hoping Chad will be home already, but he's not.

The apartment is sun-washed and tidy, and I feel some of my tension drain as I kick off my heels and pad across the wood floor. Despite my desperate revision of the event, I'm still flashing on the sight of the man hitting the windshield, hearing that crunch of metal, seeing that spray of blood. Underneath that, there's a current of deep disappointment that the meeting didn't go the way I had hoped.

After hanging my coat and tote on the hooks in the hallway, I carry my little box right into the bathroom.

I'm two weeks late.

This is it.

The absolute worst time to have a baby—when we're both broke, our futures uncertain. But I don't care. This is the thing I want more than I want any other thing—a baby, a family. My whole body, my heart, aches for it. I stalk playgrounds and offer to babysit the children of our friends. I browse baby names online and gaze longingly at images of stylish nurseries on Pinterest. It's not just me; Chad wants this, too. We so badly hope to create the family neither one of us have. I'm estranged from mine; Chad's parents both died too young in a car accident. Now that Ivan's gone, we're alone.

We'll make this work. This baby. This life. We will. He'll get this