



Killer Look (An Alexandra Cooper Novel)

By Linda Fairstein

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***New York Times* bestselling author Linda Fairstein delivers a heart-pounding thriller that explores the dark secrets of Manhattan's iconic fashion scene in her latest Alexandra Cooper novel.**

New York City is one of the fashion capitals of the world, well-known for its glamour and style. Nowhere is this more apparent than on the runway, where American haute couture continually astounds with its creativity, daring, and innovation in the name of beauty. Yet high fashion means high stakes, as Alex Cooper quickly discovers when businessman and designer Wolf Savage is found dead in an apparent suicide, mere days before the biggest show of his career. When the man's daughter insists Savage's death was murder, the case becomes more than a media sensation: It is a race to find a killer in a world created entirely out of fantasy and illusion.

With her own job at the DA's office in jeopardy, and the temptation to self-medicate her PTSD with alcohol almost too strong to resist, Alex is not anyone's first choice for help. But she is determined to uncover the grime—and the possible homicide—beneath the glitz. Along with detectives Mike Chapman and Mercer Wallace, Alex must penetrate the twisted roots and mixed motives among the high-profile players in the Garment District. The investigation takes the trio from the missing money in Wolf Savage's international fashion house to his own recovery from addiction; from the role of Louisiana Voodoo in his life to his excessive womanizing; and to the family secrets he kept so well-hidden, even from those closest to him—just as things are about to get deadly on the catwalk.

With *Killer Look*, Linda Fairstein proves once again why she is the “Queen of Intelligent Suspense.”*

*Lee Child

Linda Fairstein was chief of the Sex Crimes Unit of the district attorney's office in Manhattan for more than two decades and is America's foremost legal expert on sexual assault and domestic violence. Her Alexandra Cooper novels are international bestsellers and have been translated into more than a dozen languages. She lives in Manhattan and on Martha's Vineyard.

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Editorial Review

Review

Praise for **KILLER LOOK**

“[Alexandra Cooper] just keeps getting better and better....It's not a surprise to say that this is an excellent story told by a champion ‘teller of suspense tales.’ Linda Fairstein never disappoints!”—*Suspense Magazine*

“Linda Fairstein is still keeping it fresh...not without drama that leaves us gripping the edge of the runway.”—*Martha's Vineyard Times*

“Linda Fairstein's latest...combines the drama of your favorite detective shows with a strong female heroine and a healthy dose of glitz and glam.”—*Splash* (Chicago)

“*Killer Look* maintains the high standards of one of the very best series in crime fiction.”—*Connecticut Post*

More Praise for Linda Fairstein and her novels

“The Queen of Intelligent Suspense.”—Lee Child

“A champion teller of detective tales.”—*USA Today*

“Alex Cooper is a fascinating heroine...based on the equally fascinating life of her creator.”—*O, The Oprah Magazine*

“One of the best crime fiction writers in America today.”—Nelson DeMille

“Fairstein is superbly attuned to the sinister vibes of the famous, as well as forgotten, New York City locales.”—Maureen Corrigan, NPR.org

“Riveting....[Fairstein is] as good a writer as any in the genre, and with her latest, has elevated her talent to a level seldom seen in the genre.”—*Providence Journal*

“No one is better than Fairstein at meshing research with character and plot.”—*Connecticut Post*

About the Author

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Killer Look

One

“Murder trumps everything.”

Mike Chapman turned his back and stared out the window, talking to me but unwilling to make eye contact.

“What do you mean?” I asked.

Darkness had enveloped my Vineyard landscape a bit earlier each evening as November crept up on us. The late fall also brought a bone-deep chill and the threat of a serious frost.

“Like you don’t know, Coop?”

“Of course I do, in general. But why did you say that now, Mike? Before we have dinner. Before we get into bed.”

It was six-fifteen and I was standing at the bar, refilling my glass with ice cubes and a couple of inches of Scotch. It had been three weeks since I’d been kidnapped and held by murderous thugs, out to exercise their revenge for an old grudge.

“That was the lieutenant who called,” he said, turning at the sound of the cubes dropping into place. “He’s ordered me back to the city on a case. Besides, I don’t seem to be doing much here for your post- traumatic stress.”

I sat the glass down and let the Scotch trickle over the ice to reach a good sipping temperature while I walked to Mike, wrapping my arms around his neck. “You’re doing everything for me that I need. You know that.”

“Really? And all this time I thought it was the alcohol getting you through the night,” he said. “I’m beginning to believe your view of things is that PTSD stands for Pour That Sweet Dewar’s.”

I let go of him and retreated to the bar. “A smack in the face instead of a kiss on my lips. Got that one loud and clear.”

“Then do something about it, Coop. Put the brakes on your extended cocktail hour.”

“Why? You’ve just announced that you’ll be leaving in the morning,” I said. “Did I get the message right? Murder trumps *me*, that’s for sure. My safety, my well-being, my comfort level, my—”

“‘My, my, my.’ Sounding totally self-centered now, aren’t you?” Mike said. “The *New York Post* and the other tabloids are going to miss that I-can-nibble-on-barbed-wire-and-dance-barefoot-on-burning-coals-while-I’m-sending-those-predators-up-the-river-forever crusader for justice. That image gets benched in favor of a whining sex crimes prosecutor, who trades in her silk blouses for a strait-jacket. You’ll have the sympathy of every juror in the box.”

“I’m not looking for sympathy from anyone.”

“Alexandra Cooper, for the People,” Mike said, banging his fist on the dining room table like his hand was a gavel and he was a criminal court judge. “Tall and tough, sleek and shiny, loopy grin on her face when she ventures to smile, but she’s afraid of her own shadow now. Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, I’d advise you not to make any sudden moves cause she might freak out, and never, never frown in her direction because

she takes everything very personally.”

“Cut it out, Mike.” I took another sip of the cool Scotch.

“Self-pity doesn’t become you.” He walked toward me, taking the glass from me and holding my face between his hands. “And you can lose that look in your eyes, too.”

“Fear? You’ve always told me that fear is healthy.”

“True when you’ve got something to be afraid of. That’s all over, Coop.” He pulled me against his chest and stroked my hair with his right hand. “Maybe you need to come back to New York with me. Come home.”

“This is my home.”

I bought this old farmhouse in the town of Chilmark on Martha’s Vineyard more than a dozen years ago, with my fiancé—a young doctor named Adam Nyman. When he died in a car accident on his way to our wedding weekend here, it became my refuge. The remote location and the serenity of this hidden hilltop made it a sanctuary from the stress of my high-profile work in the Manhattan District Attorney’s Office.

“You think you’re ready to go it alone?” Mike asked, rocking me gently from side to side in his long arms.

“Sooner or later I have to, don’t I? Tomorrow’s as good as any other day.”

I had been taken hostage by a stone-cold killer and his accomplices a month ago, kept bound and sedated for several days, fed only oranges and bottles of water.

“You haven’t spent a night by yourself since—” “I know exactly when.”

“Snap at me? Kind of like a dog biting the hand that feeds it,” Mike said. “A mad dog.”

Once I was rescued from my abductors, the docs had kept me in the hospital for four days to examine and observe me. I flew up here the afternoon after my release with Nina Baum—my college roommate and one of my two closest friends—who had left her husband and young son in Los Angeles to be with me for a week. When she had to go back, my other best pal, Joan Stafford, had come up from D.C. to keep watch over me. I had no secrets from either of them, and it had been so easy to confide my every thought and feeling while they tended to my fragile emotional state.

I broke away and reached my arm out to grab the glass.

Mike beat me to it and dumped the drink down the drain. “I’ve got a nice Sauvignon Blanc for dinner,” he said. “Take a break from the booze and let’s enjoy the fire for an hour.”

“Then what?” I asked. “You’ll ration me?”

“Yeah. I’ll serve you out of a thimble,” he said. “That way you won’t be as likely to pass out on me as you did last night.”

There wasn’t a better homicide detective than Mike Chapman. We had partnered on cases from the time I’d been a rookie in the DA’s Office. He had covered my back more times than I could count throughout the past decade, and he teased me mercilessly to the point at which protesting was hopeless. Since late summer, we’d been lovers, neither one of us certain that we could make this new dynamic work for us because of the tension in the intervening weeks.

Paul Battaglia, the district attorney, had told me to take off as many months as I needed to restore my sense of security. I knew, when he said it to me, that my safety wasn't an issue. He was referring to my sanity. Everyone seemed to think I'd become unbalanced by my victimization.

"I didn't pass out, Mike. I just fell asleep."

"In the middle of my best moves? Better for my ego if you go with passing out."

I walked into the living room and stretched out on the floor, on the white rug that fronted the fireplace. Mike followed me in, placed two more logs on the fire, then lay down beside me. After Joan's tour of duty as my keeper, the lieutenant had given Mike five days off to spend with me. I didn't want it to end.

"So what's the case that's taking you back to the city?" I asked, while he rubbed my bare legs. I was wearing one of his shirts, which practically covered me down to my knees.

"No reason to talk about it. Nothing special."

"There's a dead human being involved. Unnaturally dead. Of course it's special." "You're off-duty, Coop," Mike said. "And until tomorrow, so am I."

"So I can't talk about murder. I'm not allowed to drink. I'm useless in bed. What's left?" I said, trying to make Mike laugh.

"Oysters first. Then lobster. Three pounder for me and smaller one for you." "That's my surprise? Sounds delicious."

Unlike my girlfriends, Mike had tried to leave me alone in the house for a few hours each afternoon. I knew he was testing me, and it turned out I wasn't as nervous as I feared I might be.

"I've got to put some meat on your bones, babe."

After Columbus Day, all the stores and restaurants on my end of the island shut down for the winter season. The year-round population wasn't enough to support their businesses. We always bought our chowder and fried clams at the Bite, our cooked and split lobster and shucked oysters from Larsen's Fish Market, burgers and ice cream at the Galley. But they were closed till April.

"I can help you cook."

"Not your best skill set, Coop. When I start the water boiling, you can bring out the dishes and silver, and light the candles," Mike said. "Then all you've got to do is eat."

I hadn't regained much of an appetite since leaving the hospital. Waves of nausea would sweep over me from time to time for no reason at all.

I rolled over to get on top of Mike and shimmied my way up his chest so that I could put my mouth on his. I kissed him deep and long, then slid down onto the rug, on my back.

"Glad you can still chow down, Coop. You should save some of that for the lobster tail."

An hour later, after some fireplace foreplay, I spread a towel a few feet away from the hearth while Mike shucked the oysters that were fresh out of Katama Bay. "Appetizers in here," I said. "It's much more romantic."

We both inhaled the briny oysters to a mix of Sam Smith, John Legend, and Frank Sinatra. I was saving Smokey for the bedroom.

I kind of lost my way again while Mike was cooking. Not so much a function of the darkness and the wind that was picking up around the perimeter of the house and howling a bit, but the thought that tomorrow he'd be gone and I would be here alone to wrestle with my demons.

My mind wasn't on the great-looking feast that Mike had prepared, but on the bottle of wine that he opened while I plated the lobster.

"Cheers, Coop," he said, clinking his glass against mine. "You're in much better shape than you were when I put you and Nina on the plane to come up here."

I nodded my head. If that's what it looked like to him, then so be it.

"And don't be a hero. The minute you're ready to come back to the city, I'll be in charge." "I don't want Battaglia to know, Mike. I'm not ready to go back to work."

"Screw him, kid. No need for him to know your business." I held out my wineglass.

"Let me see you take a whack out of one of those claws first."

"Hardball, is it? How about giving me a straw for the vino?"

We were both subdued throughout dinner. The great thing about lobster was that I could hide the parts I didn't eat in the shells that would be discarded. I just wasn't hungry.

By the time I did the dishes—seizing the chance to pour myself a nightcap—Mike was in the bedroom suite, showering. I stripped off my clothes and stepped in beside him, under the giant rain-shower head. I lathered up and shampooed my hair, eager to get the day's anxiety washed away.

I crawled into bed next to Mike. He was on his back, one hand behind his head, staring up at the ceiling.

"Don't worry about me," I said. "About tomorrow." "That's not where I was, Coop."

"Your victim, then?" "Yeah."

"Who was he?" "She."

"She? Do I know the case?"

"It's not exactly a bedtime story." "Try me," I said.

"You're doing well enough with your own nightmares, kid." "I'm mostly over that, Mike."

"Bullshit," he said. "You were thrashing around like a dervish night before last." "That was then, Detective. Maybe I can help. What case?"

"You don't know it. The body was found two weeks ago, while you were up here." "I read the newspapers every day."

"Some vics don't make the headlines, Coop. They just lay on a slab at the morgue, waiting for someone to

come along and claim them.”

“How’d she die?”

“Blunt force trauma, we think.” “How come you don’t know?”

“The body was pulled out of the East River, south of the Triborough Bridge.” “Who was she?”

“I heard you the first time you asked,” Mike said. “We didn’t have a clue at the time. There was no ID on her, and the sea creatures had done a pretty good job gnawing on her face and fingers. But that’s why I’m going back to work.”

“You mean you don’t even know her name?”

“Lieutenant Peterson just got a confirmation on that at three this afternoon.” “Thank God someone finally claimed her. I hate to think of—”

“Nobody’s claimed her yet.” “So how was she identified?”

“The broad had silicone breast implants, Coop. Seems that one of them survived intact during her submersion in that floating cesspool they call a river.”

“What did that give you?”

“Every implant has a manufacturer’s serial number on it, so it can be tracked for quality assurance or defects.”

“Seriously?”

“Yeah. An implant is a medical device, kid, just like a pacemaker or defibrillator. So Tanya Root— that’s the broad’s name—had her breasts enhanced last year at a clinic in Rio. Now all I have to do is find out who wanted her dead.”

Two

Morning fog, a common occurrence on the Vineyard, delayed Mike’s seven-thirty flight to White Plains. The major airlines didn’t run this time of year, so he was on a single-engine nine-seater Tradewinds flight to a small airport just north of the city.

“So what will you do to figure out who Tanya Root is?”

We were on our third cup of joe in the Plane View coffee shop, in the terminal at the edge of the airfield. I was trying to distract Mike, whose cloud-gazing was a hopeless attempt to gauge the turbulence of his flight off the island. He had an intense fear of flying—just about the only thing I knew, other than commitment to a personal relationship, that scared him.

“The usual,” Mike said. “The lieutenant put Jimmy North on the case with me.”

“He’s that new kid in the squad who worked with you to—well, to find me, isn’t he?” “Yeah. Whip-smart. Great cop.”

“He must know something by now,” I said.

“Ran a background check on the name and came up with one hundred thirty seven African-American Tanya Roots in the USA.”

“But there must be more specifics in the medical record from the clinic. Date of birth? Home address?”

Mike checked the email on his iPhone—the last case convinced him that his vintage flip had obvious drawbacks—and read from it. “The address Miss Formerly Flat-chested gave was a flophouse hotel in Rio near the clinic.”

“No help there,” I said.

“The medical history lists her as saying she was from the States, but nobody cared about the GPS coordinates as long as she was paying cash. And the doc noted that he guessed her DOB was phony. She used one that made her twenty-three, but he figures she was closer to thirty.”

“Weird that he would make a note about that.”

“Not so much,” Mike said. “He did it in the context of encouraging her to come back for work on her eyes, and to think about a first facelift before she was forty. So he did his own professional estimate of when she might plan those events.”

Instinctively I reached for my chin. I was thirty-eight, and not the plastic surgery type. I liked what nature did to faces of those who lived interesting lives. But I checked to make sure my jawline was still firm. I couldn't imagine a facelift at this age.

“Don't worry, Coop. You flap your mouth too much to develop any flab under there.”

I could hear the engines of the small plane before I saw its white fuselage break through the low clouds. Its wings were tilting left to right, fighting the wind and weather as the pilot struggled to set it down on the runway.

“So why all the talk of work on her face and body?” I asked. “Because she told the good doc that she was a model.”

“A model?”

“That's what we've got to go on. A name that may or may not be legit. A phony date of birth. No address. And we know that somebody crushed her skull and threw her into the drink from somewhere in East Harlem.”

“Was there enough detail for a facial reconstruction?”

“Forensic anthropology at the M.E.'s office is working on that now. From what I saw of the remains, it will be rough to do one,” Mike said. “But we've got to get some kind of image into the papers and out in public. The tabs would probably rather put close-ups of her breasts on page one, and the doc has plenty of those.”

“It would be great if they can't get their hands on that stuff.”

“This investigation is going to be worked more like a grand larceny auto than a homicide.”

“That’s cold,” I said.

“Every car has a VIN number, Coop. Find a stolen car, an abandoned one—whether it’s a ’95 Chevy or a 2015 Jag—the VIN will trace you back to the owner. Just a fact. Tanya’s breasts have unique digits. Sooner or later we’ll put them together with the right broad.”

The pre-screening announcement for Mike’s flight came over the loudspeaker. He picked up his duffel bag and left money for the bill and tip.

“Thing is about models,” I said, standing up to walk with Mike to the security check-in, “is that they’ve sort of made it by seventeen, or twenty-one at the latest. If Tanya Root has any kind of career, someone should call in with info the minute you go live with the story.”

“Hoping so, kid.”

“But a late twenty-something trying to make a change in her professional life by enhancing her bra size doesn’t sound like top runway material to me.”

“That’s why I expect my day will be knocking on doors and coming up empty till we get some kind of lucky break,” Mike said.

“There’s a huge fashion show at the Metropolitan Museum next week,” I said. “I’m sure lots of models are in town and around for that. Might be people involved there you could talk to about your victim. I feel so totally useless to you these days.”

Mike dropped his duffel to embrace me and deliver a last pep talk. “It’s all behind us, Coop. You’ve got no one looking to do you any harm, there’s no bogeyman hiding under your bed, and you’ve got a bigger and better support system than anyone I can think of.”

I had flashbacks, whether my eyes were open or closed. Before I got out of bed every morning, I had relived the moment of my abduction a dozen times. The smallest exercise that required no thought—brushing my teeth or putting on lipstick—gave me the chance to revisit hours spent with my captors. The videotape in my brain was on a loop that kept replaying itself constantly.

“I know you’re right,” I said to Mike. And he knew I was lying.

“You going straight back to the house?” he asked. “I am.”

He kissed me on the forehead. “I’ll call you when I land.”

“That’s if your white knuckles haven’t embedded themselves in the armrests on the plane.”

“Glad you haven’t lost your sense of humor entirely, Coop,” Mike said. “I’ve got my big boy pants on though. I’ll be fine.”

There were only two other passengers traveling with Mike. I watched them load up and waited until the plane taxied out to the runway, revved up its engine, and took off into the dark clouds overhead.

I was back up in Chilmark by the time Mike touched down 45 minutes later. He had business to do, and I needed to adjust to life alone. I locked the front door of the house—unheard of to do on the Vineyard—but

now every precaution I took seemed reasonable to me.

The first clap of thunder nearly bounced me out of the chair in my office. It was an odd time of year to have an electrical storm. I didn't need the fury of a sound and light show to unsettle me.

It caused the house power to go and my internet service to crash, but only nineteen seconds for the generator to kick in and get everything re-booted.

I tried to distract myself with a good book, but most of the things on my shelf were crime novels or 19th century British literature, the latter an interest that had absorbed me since my days majoring in English at Wellesley College. I lost my taste for both the hard-boiled and the dense storytelling— temporarily, I hoped.

I phoned in to some of my team at the DA's Office, but everyone seemed to be in the courtroom or the morgue or the Special Victims Squad, handling their own cases as well as doubling-down to cover my load of investigations and trials, too.

The turkey sandwich I made was dry and tasteless. I played with half of it and threw away the rest. The rain had stopped by early afternoon. I was reclining on a sofa in the living room—feeling too lethargic to do anything—so I was making my third or fourth attempt to recreate the steps I had taken last month when I left celebrating colleagues at Primola Restaurant to slip off to meet an ex-boyfriend. I was looking for a safer route than the one I had chosen last month.

I heard the car's tires crunching on the broken clam shells that decorated the long drive up to my property line before I saw its black silhouette.

I went to the window to check out my visitor. I was shaking uncontrollably as I tapped in the password on my iPhone.

It looked as though there was a driver in front and two heads in the back seat.

I scrolled my contacts to get to the Chilmark Police Station, two miles away. They would have a quicker response time than the down-island officers who manned the 911 calls.

The rear door on the driver's side of the car opened and I saw a man's leg kick out and plant itself on the wet path. Then just as quickly, the man pulled his leg back inside and the idling car lurched into reverse.

"Chilmark Police. How can I help you?"

"This is Alexandra Cooper," I said, blurting out my address, too. "There's just been an intruder at my house and I need an officer up here immediately."

"Alex? This is Wally Flanders. Someone broke into your house?"

"Wally! So glad it's you," I said. I'd known him for years and didn't have to explain my background and why I might be in danger. "Not a break in, no, but—"

"What do you mean by 'intruder'? Have you had a burglary?" he asked. "Mike Chapman dropped in the other day. Sort of told me about things. He's with you now, isn't he?"

"No. Mike just flew off this morning," I said. Of course he stopped at the police station on one of his outings so the locals wouldn't think I was crazy if I called for help. "Not a burglary, no."

“What then?” Wally asked. “I can be up there in ten minutes.”

“A car. A car with strangers in it just drove up to the house. A guy started to get out and then they must have seen me in the window and backed off,” I said. “Backed off for now.”

“Drove up to your front door, Alex?”

“Not exactly. But whoever it was trespassed on my property.”

I could hear myself talking but couldn't stop. I had fielded this kind of call from unhinged witnesses—solid people who'd had screws shaken loose by a close call with crime, as well as total whackjobs who had never been grounded in the first place. I didn't want to be the crackpot caller, but I was doing a damned good imitation of one.

“So you're not hurt, Alex, are you?” Wally asked. “And there's been no forced entry at your home?” “Not yet.”

“To be clear then, we've got a trespass. Unauthorized car drove up to your front door and—” “Actually, Wally, the car stopped before coming onto my lawn.”

“You mean he was on the path that leads to you from State Road?”

I knew what was coming next. I didn't own that path. It was the common property of the three other neighbors—none of them winter residents—who lived on my deserted dead-end hilltop.

I tried to modulate my voice as my nerves continued to fray. “Still, Wally, there's no one here this week. I'm all alone. There's no legitimate reason for anyone to drive in here.”

“Alex? I'll come up there if you'd like. I can be there in a flash,” Wally said. “But you do know that Fern's house has been on the market for four years, don't you?” I knew that as well as I knew my name. “Sure.”

“There's real estate people in and out of there all the time, since the price came down over Labor Day. Could be just an honest mistake, Alex, but I'll come up and check it out right away.”

I didn't do my usual and tell him not to bother. I wanted to see a cop on my turf, and I wanted to see him before darkness fell.

“That would be great. I'd really appreciate it,” I said. “Do we have Uber on the island yet?”

I was still confused about why the Uber car I had called the night of my kidnapping hadn't seen what the perps did to me. Everyone was still a suspect in my overworked mind.

“Uber? You mean the car service?” Wally said. “None of that bullshit here yet. Just Patti's Taxi and Aquinnah Cabs. You need a lift?” “Just asking.”

“I'll be right up, Alex.”

“Thanks so much, Wally. See you shortly.”

I was throwing my clothes and toiletries into my tote when my phone rang. “Hey, kid, what's keeping you busy?”

“Just trying to relax, Mike. You know. Reading a bit. Thinking about having a massage delivered to me at home,” I tried to joke. “Sweet to hear your voice.”

“You okay, babe? You sound kind of tense,” he said. “Did I forget to put that child-proof safety lock on the Dewar’s?”

“Not funny.”

“Look, Coop, Wally just gave me a call.”

“What? Whatever happened to privileged conversations?” I had gone from unbalanced to angry in a flash. “I’m livid that he told you about it.”

“Wally Flanders is neither your lawyer nor doctor. And he’s certainly not a priest or rabbi,” Mike said. “He’s looking out for you. How’s that? He’s doing what I asked him to do in case I had to leave. I just didn’t know if the phantom of the black sedan was a real thing or a Scotch-induced vision.”

“I haven’t had a thing to drink, Mike. That car was— well, okay, this is what you want to hear, right? I’m hallucinating. Does that make you happy?”

“Whoa. The rabid dog mood is back. Gotta love that pooch.”

“We’re about to be disconnected, Detective Chapman. Wally’s knocking on the front door.” And I needed a drink more than I needed oxygen.

“Record time, Wally,” I said. “I think it’s only been eight minutes since we hung up. I can’t thank you enough.”

“Newspapers made it sound like you’ve been to hell and back. I don’t blame you for being jumpy.” “I know I’m perfectly safe here.”

“That black car is next door, Alex. Real estate broker showing the place to some folks from DC. Comfortable with that?”

“It’s still here? How long is it going to take them?”

I didn’t feature being alone on this road with people I didn’t know. “I’ll walk back there and find out, Alex.”

I hesitated for a minute and then decided to ask anyway. “Wally, there’s no direct flight to New York after the morning one that Mike was on, right? Is there still a 5pm Cape Air to Boston this time of year?”

“Yeah. It’s the only late afternoon flight out of here now.”

That would take just thirty-three minutes, and then I could grab the shuttle to LaGuardia.

“Are things quiet enough—I mean, except for me,” I said, with a forced laugh, “that I might impose on you to run me to the airport?”

“I don’t see why not, Alex. I’ll walk next door,” he said. “Can you be ready in ten minutes?” “You bet.”

He backed out of my doorway, left his car in place, and walked up the drive toward my neighbor’s home.

I dialed Cape Air, booked myself into one of the three remaining seats, and poured a short nip of Scotch while I finished gathering my things.

The bumpy flight was right on time. I'd been through worse things than air pockets lately. I dragged my suitcase across to the Delta terminal, submitted myself to the metal detector, and boarded the 7:30 shuttle to LaGuardia.

I didn't make the choice of my destination until the cab driver had crossed the bridge and headed south on the FDR, passing the spot, no doubt, where Tanya Root's body had been dumped in the river. If I went home, I risked the possible rejection of Mike not coming over to me when his tour ended.

I gave the driver the address of Mike's apartment—a tiny walk-up near York Avenue on E. 64th Street that was so small and dark he had nicknamed it “the coffin.”

We'd had keys to each other's homes for more years than I could remember, for an assortment of good reasons. I climbed the stairs and let myself in.

I didn't bother to unpack, but I took a steaming hot shower before I tossed Mike's dirty underwear and socks off the bed and settled myself under the covers.

It was after eleven p.m. when I heard the door close behind him and looked up at his face as he stood over me. His fingers were combing through his thick black hair as his puzzled expression turned into a smile.

“What happened, Coop?”

“I needed you, Mike. Murder trumped everything but that.”

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From reader reviews:

Elizabeth Ashton:

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