

ALEX BARCLAY

Harm's Reach

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PROLOGUE

Ingrid Prince realized that the white walls in every Prince family home created a diorama effect. People watched from the outside, studying, deducing, then leaving, even after brief encounters, with lasting judgements. Ingrid Prince, the beautiful, radiant wife! Robert Prince, the handsome, wealthy husband, a man of fine stock!

Oh, what they see . . . and don't see.

Ingrid closed her eyes.

I am safe. I am safe. I am safe.

'Close those beautiful cat eyes, Ingrid, and say it three times. "It" is wherever you want to take us. I am Tahiti. I am Tahiti. I am Tahiti. Then – bam! – eyes open – bam! – I shoot!'

She could hear Sandro Cera's voice in her head as he stalked around her all those years ago. Handsome, talented, orphan, immigrant Sandro Cera, the rags-to-riches-and-back fashion photographer; Ingrid Prince, at his feet, blonde, tanned, extended on the white floor of a freezing studio in Brooklyn, shivering by a faulty space heater.

Camera in hand, Sandro would rise up onto the balls of

his feet, crouch down, close in, create distance, his body twisting and turning as if he was the one to be captured.

Ingrid did as he asked, closed her eyes, used his three-times trick.

‘No lips moving!’ Sandro said. *No leaps*. ‘These are thoughts I’m talking about. Three times, sweets, three times: I am silent, I am silent, I am silent!’

‘My teeth are chattering is why my lips are moving!’ said brave, bold, new-girl Ingrid, just turned seventeen. ‘I’m fucking hypothermic . . . times three.’

Click flash click flash click flash. And the photo that made them both famous was the one that was taken just afterwards, as Ingrid laughed, her head thrown back, then forward, the lens capturing a warm and beautiful smile with no Brooklyn ice, just St Tropez, St Tropez, St Tropez.

It was a different world. It was New York in the Nineties – when they partied below ground and cauterized their hearts’ wounds with the fire of quick fucks. Sandro Cera had been dead years – a gradual, then sudden junkie demise. In the live art installation of Ingrid’s life, Sandro Cera was the lightbulb in the corner, flickering ominously, bound to blow.

Yet his was the advice she was now hearing.

Three times.

I am safe. I am safe. I am safe.

Ingrid looked around the Colorado rental. Even the temporary homes she sought refuge in were white-walled, sparsely furnished, neutral. When their SoHo loft was shot for an interiors magazine, the stylist pared it back even more, took pieces away. Pieces: furniture, paintings, sculptures, reality. How suddenly the landscape can change when its elements are plucked away.

* * *

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Ingrid heard a noise at the front door. Light on her feet, she walked out into the long polished hallway. Her suitcases were at the end by the door: a set of five, olive green, edged in brown leather with accents of gold.

Now, there was banging at the door, hammering. Ingrid froze. The door burst open. She felt a rush of adrenaline.

This is not how it ends. This is not how it ends. This is not how it ends.

She backed into the kitchen, then turned, set to run for the French doors, but she could make out two dark figures standing there. Ingrid was briefly blindsided by her reflection in the glass.

She knew what she looked like to others. She knew what her husband looked like.

A Swedish proverb came to mind: *Alla känner apan, men apan känner ingen.*

Everyone knows the monkey, but the monkey knows no one.

Five weeks earlier . . .
Denver, Colorado

Special Agent Ren Bryce was sitting in an aisle seat of a three-star hotel conference room, primed to run. She was dressed in blue jeans, a white tank and gold strappy heels. Her dark hair was in a shiny ponytail, her makeup was for going out. Since she'd sat down, she had been twisting the silver-and-gold cuff on her narrow wrist, opening it and closing it. It was shaped like a lightning bolt.

I wonder does it work? Will it make me fly? Or zap people.

She looked around.

Men, women, no children, gathered in a beige room on a sticky Sunday night. Everyone so, so miserable.

There was a lectern in front with an A4 printout stuck to it that read: 'Bipolar Support'.

Annnd so explains the misery.

Up ahead, a large lady moved awkwardly to the stage. She was wild-haired and makeup-free, except for the crazy shade of cherry on her lips. She looked as if she had dressed under pressure; grabbed a blouse and skirt from a peg in the

hallway on her way out the door and slipped her feet into a pair of sandals she'd left in the garden.

'Partying . . .' she began.

Oh, dear God, do not laugh at this poor woman whose only parties may have been Twilight-themed.

The speaker continued: 'Sorry,' she said. 'Before I start, I should say that tonight I am going to talk about mania.'

This will be good . . .

Ren checked her watch. She was here only because her boss had told her to come.

There's a first time for everything, Gary Dettling, and a last time. In this particular instance, they are one and the same.

Gary Dettling had been her boss in the Undercover Program and also her case agent on the deep cover investigation that nearly destroyed her. She had done a dazzling job, though. Her investigation was the exemplary one, the one still used in UC training. Ren's own boyfriend, Ben Rader, had studied her case. But the official story didn't include the part where, within months of finishing the investigation, the exemplary agent was diagnosed bipolar. Ren had yet to talk him through that bonus feature.

She looked around the room at the ordinariness of everyone.

What could any of you know about what it's like to be me?

The woman at the lectern continued: 'Imagine telling someone who has been at a spectacular week-long party that the next night, they have to be in bed by ten p.m. As they are dancing on a table, laughing, swigging from a vodka bottle, surrounded by friends, new and old, you tell them that, really, they should stop. This feeling, this amazing feeling is not good.

'As you reach out to prise the bottle from their hand, they will see you as reaching inside their soul to switch off a light.

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And they will claw at your hand to stop you, and as they do, they will look into your eyes with one of two things: an anger so intense that it could take your breath away, or a hurt so deep that it could break your heart. Who are you to take away their high? You are supposed to love them, you are supposed to value their happiness above all else.

'And the following will happen: they will attack, and it will hurt. It will hurt.' She looked up at the crowd. 'Face the manic, face the consequences. Poop the party, prepare to be pooped on.'

I need to get out of here. This is wildly accurate.

Ren bent down to grab her purse from the floor. She caught sight of the little orange bottle of mood stabilizers inside.

Five months. Yay . . . great to have you on the show . . .

'And as your loved one attacks,' the speaker was saying, 'and as the pain rips through you, they will further your pain by turning to someone else instead. Who can they find to party with when you won't? Who can they spend all their money with? Maybe all *your* money. Who can they have all that sex with? Not you. You are pathetic. You are a nag. You want them to be miserable. You just want to control them. That's all you want. You don't really love them. You are now the enemy.'

There are people crying in here. I can hear people crying.

'Hey, nice tits,' said the guy three seats away from Ren.

What the? Ren turned to him. *And Happy Manic Descent to you!*

The guy shifted one seat closer.

Ren held up a finger to him. 'OK, you have to be shitting me.'

'I'm not!' he said, beaming. 'You are really beautiful.'

May the scales of mania fall from your eyes.

‘This is not happening,’ said Ren, her voice low. ‘Go back to your seat. And . . .’ She pointed at the lectern.

This is for you, buddy.

He did as she asked.

‘Dayum, though . . .’ she heard him say.

The woman on the other side of him slipped her hand under his, squeezed it, gently. His wedding band shone.

Another lost victim, searching for the husband who is right there, but gone on his travels, not a care in the world.

‘Your loved one will retreat,’ said the speaker, ‘or run . . . or hide from you. Or at least will attempt to. They don’t yet know that what they are running from is pain. Overwhelming pain: loss, rejection, grief, fear. They don’t know yet, because they’re having too much fun. Secret fun. They can’t admit that while you’re sick with worry, they’re having a blast. They may see your tears, but they don’t feel them. They’re waiting for a text or a drink or a party or a pay check or new friends who don’t know who they are or who loves them or what really lies in their heart or what needs to be protected. Your loved one may endure your interventions, your attempts at reasoning with them, but really? They’re in their own world. It takes different things to get through to different people; it won’t always be obvious. And what worked once before may not work the next time.

‘Until you find a way, they will dig their heels into the bright green grass of their dazzling universe of plenty. They will tune into whoever is emitting the same Day-Glo frequency. Imagine a fluorescent pink jagged line running through the city just above head height, visible only to the manic or the drunk, or the drugged, or all of the above. And they are each holding a magical hook and they can just reach up and ride around on that line all night long. And they will do that until, eventually . . . days, weeks, or months later, they will lose their grip.’

Ren closed her eyes. *And that, ladies and gentlemen, is the beautiful, damaging world I miss.*

She walked to the back of the room and quietly made her way out.

The name is Mania . . . Mrs Mania.

I-80, Nebraska

Laura Flynn changed radio stations until she heard what she needed: words that would find her in the dark; a song that would fill this little car with the right message, a song that would back up her journey. This wasn't her first life-changing decision. There had been others; some borne of tragedy, others borne of happiness or kindness or love. This was different – this was the consequence of an extraordinary misjudgment. She was halfway across Nebraska, halfway into a cross-country expedition and, if she stopped too long to consider it all, she should have been searching for a song with madness in the title.

Here I am, twenty-six years old, a girl from a small coastal village, yet it is in the Midwest I find myself at sea.

She changed station again. She heard an evangelist; deep, male tones of crazy. *This is what I'm talking about.*

'Right here, right now,' came the voice, 'in the terrible darkness of our world, sins – like rats – are crawling out of every gutter, creeping into our homes, burrowing under their foundations, the foundations of righteousness and virtue. A virus of sin is finding the weakest chambers of our sinful bodies, where it will fester, from whence it will spread. I'm talking about diseases of the mind, the soul, the heart, the loins.'

Laura Flynn laughed out loud.

The presenter's voice cut through. *'Those were the words of Howard Coombes, who will be speaking at Monday night's service to honor the victims of the Aurora Theater shooting.'*

'Oh, Lord, have mercy, we are both headed in the same direction,' said Laura. *It might just be hell.* She laughed again.

I can laugh. At least, I can still laugh. Even at my 'seriously, is this really my life?' moment, the 'how did it all come to this?' Janey Mac!

'Janey Mac' was a polite alternative to Jesus Christ. It was years since her sister had told her about a guy called Janey Mac who used to drink in the dive bar where she had worked in Yonkers. Janey Mac got his nickname long before then. It was a three-story nickname. His last name was McMullen. Mac. He thought he was God. Jesus Christ. And he was a supplier of guns. Janie's Got a Gun. The result was: *Janey Mac*. When he fled to Chicago to get away from a warrant, he became Janey Mach 3. Laura liked that. And as a story, it always raised a laugh.

Laura's sister had once mixed with the wrong kind of people. But sometimes the wrong kind of people ended up being exactly the kind of people you needed.

The car filled with flashing lights; headlights from behind. They flashed again. It wasn't a police car. She drove on. The lights flashed again.

Maybe I have a broken taillight. Maybe the trunk is open.

This was her first time driving the car, maybe she was missing something. She checked the panel in front of her; no warning lights. She pulled in. Her heart was pounding. The car behind pulled in too. *Should I be nervous?* She could see someone, a man in black, pulling a mask up over his face, running toward her. *Oh my God.* Her heart rate shot up. Then he was in her side mirror. Right there.

No, no, no. She began to scramble for the door handle. Her fingers were numb. *Move. Move. Move.* But he was there, he was opening the door. It was open. He was holding a gun. Laura stared up at him, willing herself to speak, willing

herself to tell him no, don't do this, why are you doing this. Nothing came out. *Speak! Scream! Shout!* She managed to turn her body toward him. His eyes, vaguely familiar, stark in the rectangular cut-out from his black mask, flickered.

Confusion? Fear? Did it matter?

Laura closed her eyes, squeezed them shut. The blast deafened her. There was a second one. She felt a searing pain in her ear. She could smell earth, the grass, the night. She felt a breeze. Through the ringing in her ears, she heard footsteps. When she opened her eyes, he was gone. Her ears still ringing, she could make out the sound of his car door open, then slam shut, the engine starting, the car skidding, turning, leaving her behind.

Her whole body started to convulse.

What was that? What the hell was that? How could he miss? He was right there. He must have more than two bullets.

Minutes passed. She sat with her hands clamped onto the steering wheel, her forehead pressed against it.

She thanked the same God she had once cursed for taking away her mother and her sister before their time. Her father was a different story, he had danced with death from the moment he brought a bottle of whiskey to his lips. He was no match for even the slowest of the Devil's quick steps.

I am one of those people from those blighted families, my life's journey a series of join-the-dots tragedies.

She put her foot on the gas.

But I'm alive. Thank you, God. Thank you. This is not my time.

New York

Robert Prince's vast TriBeCa office was lit only by the antique desk lamp on his custom four-thousand-dollar desk. There was one framed photo on top – his wife, Ingrid. He sometimes Googled her, just for fun. He had been reading a gossip

piece on them from two weekends previously, their ‘rumored baby news!’, and was now looking at a Tumblr page dedicated to her early modeling work, created by someone who was probably in junior high at the time. Robert wondered if it was easier for a man like that to idolize an image from the past; was the extra remove a small way of justifying why he couldn’t have her? Not because a woman like that would always be untouchable to a man like him, but simply because she no longer existed in that form. This man had described her as *a woman of exceptional beauty*. Robert felt a small stab of envy that it was not he who had formulated this perfect description of his wife, that he had not presented it to her himself, maybe on a hand-written card on a tray at breakfast time. He loved her like no other woman. Not that there had been many. He had never been a ladies’ man. He respected them too much. He was Ingrid’s man.

His cell phone rang and the face of exceptional beauty flashed on the screen. He picked up. ‘Hey, sweetheart.’

‘It’s me!’ said Ingrid at the same time.

Robert loved how she announced herself on the phone. Of course it was her. But she spoke every time as if it would be a surprise to him. Maybe it was something about her bouncy Nordic twang.

‘I just got a PDF of our magazine spread,’ she said. ‘The *official* announcement. Oh my goodness, listen to this: “The Baby Prince”! How pregnancy suits me. They call you my “besotted husband”; I have “tamed Robert Prince”!’

‘I *am* your besotted husband,’ said Robert. ‘But can you tame a mouse?’

‘Mouse!’ said Ingrid. ‘Tiger.’

Robert laughed. ‘With you, I’m a mouse.’

‘Well, journalists see you in a different way . . .’ she said.

‘As they see you . . .’ said Robert.

There was a short silence.

'The photos are great,' said Ingrid.

'Good, good,' said Robert.

'I have to warn you, though, they've used that old shot of you with the Lotus—'

'Well, you can get them to remove it – I presume the purpose of the PDF was for pre-approval.' Robert had a collection of eleven historic racing cars. The Lotus Series 2 Super Seven had been his favorite. And it had been totaled on New Year's Day, through no fault of his.

'I'll see what I can do,' said Ingrid. 'But I love it. It just captures you so well. You look so happy.'

'Well, now I feel a little sadder,' said Robert.

'It's only a car, everyone's alive,' she said.

'I know that,' said Robert. 'I know. Speaking of precious lives, is Laura back?'

'No,' said Ingrid, 'but I was expecting her about an hour ago.'

'You didn't go to the airport?' said Robert.

Ingrid laughed. 'No, Robert. You're very sweet, though. She was getting a cab. She insisted.'

'And you haven't heard from her?' said Robert. 'And she's late?'

'No, but I'm sure she's fine.'

'I tried her phone; it was diverted to voicemail.'

'She was probably in the air,' said Ingrid.

'I worry,' said Robert.

'I know. But there's no need.' Ingrid paused. 'I miss you.'

'No – you miss New York.'

'What?' said Ingrid. 'That's not true. What are you talking about? Are you OK?'

'I am,' said Robert. 'Of course I am. I love you, sweetheart.'

Sleep tight. I'm going to finish up here shortly. Text me when Laura gets in.'

'OK – sleep well,' said Ingrid. 'Talk tomorrow. Love you.'

Robert ended the call and stared out into the night. He looked down at the letter on his desk. It was dated August 1st, 1919, written by his great-grandfather, the source of much of his wealth, copper-mining star, Patrick Prince.

Dear Fr Dan,

I hope this finds you in good health. Thank you most sincerely for accepting Walter into your community for the coming months. Though now just sixteen years old, he is already showing signs of acuity and I have no doubt that, in business, his efforts will bear fruit. Please do not let that blind you. I want you to put him to work on the ranch, in the barns, and tending to those less fortunate. I want him to rise with the sun, and to brighten with it.

Please help me, Dan, please help my son. As you know, I made my fortune mining the depths, drawing forth from the earth to provide for my family and to allow others to provide for theirs. However, my keen sense of what lies hidden has failed me in matters personal. From the shadows, my reasoning would be that the reach of good men is often hindered. In contrast, I fear that harm's reach has no bounds, and – far worse – invisible fingers.

All the best,
Pat

Family was important to Robert Prince. Life was important. He considered birth, death and after-life carefully. He slid open his drawer, took out his Bible and set it on top of the

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letter. He let his hands rest on the black leather cover, his fingertips on the debossed golden letters. All over the world, people were reading this same text and finding different messages.

Different messages.

Robert opened the Bible on a random page. He wanted to find the right words. Wasn't that all anyone wanted? To know . . . *to feel* . . . the right words.

Special Agent Ren Bryce leaned over the map that was spread out on a table in Wells Fargo in Conifer, Jefferson County. It was two thirty p.m., she was tired, her sleep had been haunted by the braless support-group lady with the insightful mind. She was haunted now by lunch smells – tuna sandwiches and broccoli soup. There was also a hint of gasoline in the air.

‘I am on a losing streak,’ said Ren. ‘I’ve never felt less deserving of the title special . . . or agent. Today I have been an agent of zero. We could have our own true crime show – *The After-The-Fact Files*.’

‘Harsh,’ said Cliff. ‘We’re fifty miles from base camp . . . we’re not *The Avengers*.’

Ren made a face. ‘I like to think of us that way . . .’

‘Well, I will always assemble wherever you are,’ said Cliff.

For twenty-five years, Cliff had been with the JeffCo Sheriff’s Office, but, along with Ren and eight others, now worked for the multi-agency Rocky Mountain Safe Streets Task Force in Denver. Cliff had a gift for making witnesses and suspects believe he was one of them: weary, disgruntled,

disappointed with life, put-upon by authority figures. He once told her that sometimes he felt they revealed their secrets to him because they believed he would bury the information out of solidarity. He managed to convince even the brightest felons that he operated under duress, and really, if he could just catch a break, he'd be running free, happy and lawless. Cliff James – warm, huggable, big-bear, chuckling, family-man Cliff, who cared about justice more than most – could have missed a vocation as a Hollywood star.

'We need to assemble where the bandits are,' said Ren. The bandits had first drawn Safe Streets upon themselves one month earlier. This was their fourth strike; always the same M.O.: they entered the bank wearing beanies pulled down to their eyebrows and snowboarding masks pulled up to their noses – the ones with graphic prints that gave them the lower jaws of sharks. Funny for snowboarding with your buddies, not so much for bank customers confronted with a blur of sharp teeth, wild eyes and gunfire. Safe Streets could have called them the Jawsome Bandits, but that was too complimentary. They were, instead, the Shark Bait Bandits.

The first robber would spray the ceiling with bullets from a semi-automatic, then jump onto a counter or a table. He roared and growled and, as customers dropped to the floor, the second guy moved to the counter. He would show the cashier a note requesting cash, as if the gunfire was too subtle a message. The note also offered a bullet to the head in exchange for a dye pack or a tracking device.

Cliff rested his elbow on Ren's shoulder.

'Look,' he said, pointing to a small little enclave of houses on the map, 'Iroquois Heights.'

Ren had Iroquois heritage; it gave an exotic twist to looks whose ethnic origins were a mystery to many.

She smiled. 'It's a sign! Hey – you are too big to lean on me,' she said, turning to look up at him.

'I was going easy,' said Cliff, standing up.

'Unlike . . .' said Ren. She nodded toward the corner where Gary Dettling stood with his hands on his hips, staring over at them. He was the only man she knew who could put his hands on his hips and not look ridiculous.

'He is not a happy man today,' said Cliff.

'And when you say "today", you mean "for quite some time" . . .' said Ren.

'He's coming our way,' said Cliff. 'Eyes on the map.'

Jefferson County stretched westward from the city of Denver up into the mountains bordering Gilpin County, Clear Creek and Park. It was seven hundred and seventy square miles of every crime and mentality that came from spanning big cities and boondocks.

The Conifer locals unlucky enough to have been present when their Wells Fargo was hit were feeling a little plagued. It was not long ago they had been hit by a wildfire that moved as if it had plans to rescale the town and bring it back to its roots. Over the years, Conifer had been expanding slowly, adding grocery stores, gas stations and charmed out-of-towners who settled in the foothills until the snow startled them out of their mountain fantasy and into Kendall Auto Sales looking for tire chains.

But the unpredictable snowfall was nothing compared to the onslaught of the wildfire. It roared and spat at them for two weeks, darkening their skies, driving them from their beds or keeping them lying awake in them, fearing for everything. And then, it was gone. The fire died before it took away a single home. The firefighters had not performed a miracle as some people saw it. The firefighters had carefully strategized, and won a war; only the charred landscape bore the scars.

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Detective Denis Kohler from the Sheriff's Office walked over to Ren, Cliff and Gary. Kohler was tall and flat-bodied, with a lean to one side and a slight bow to his legs. His brown hair flopped across the right side of his forehead and he often ran his fingers through it, even though it was too short to get in his eyes.

'OK, our guys followed your bandits ten miles,' he said. 'Looked like they were headed for Bailey, but they lost them. The car was found on a service road, torched. They made off on foot.'

'That's new for them . . .' said Ren.

'Well, they had the full weight of the JeffCo Sheriff's Office bearing down on them this time,' said Kohler, smiling.

Ren laughed. She liked Kohler. 'Did they find anything in the car?' she said.

'It's destroyed,' said Kohler. 'Looks like they crashed first. We're waiting for it to be towed.'

'And it was taken from the parking lot at the spa outside the business center . . .' said Gary.

'Yup, a lady customer came out – car was gone,' said Kohler.

Ren shook her head. 'I don't know why women feel the need to go to spas, said no woman ever.'

'What about cameras?' said Gary.

'We don't have a lot to go on with this route,' said Kohler. 'We've spoken with CDOT, we'll see what they've got.'

'Gary,' said Cliff, 'I have that appointment, so, if you're all OK here?'

'Sure,' said Gary, 'go ahead.'

Cliff hugged Ren.

'Bye, big guy,' she said. 'We shall avenge another day.'

'Take care, Cliff,' said Kohler.

Ren stared down at the map. 'Is this the service road?'

Kohler looked at where she was pointing. 'Yes.'

'Would you mind if Gary and I swung by?' said Ren. 'That's right by Pine Gulch Cemetery. They could have gone through there, come out the other side and grabbed a car from that garage.' She pointed again. 'If they did that, they could have driven right down Pine Valley Road. They may not have been heading for Bailey after all. Or at the very least, Pine Valley Road was a panic move . . .'

'Sure, go ahead,' said Kohler.

'Gary?' said Ren. *Earth to Gary.*

He nodded. 'Sure. Great.'

No car had been stolen from the garage by Pine Gulch Cemetery. Gary swung back around and they drove down Pine Valley Road, past where the Sheriff's Office detectives and crime scene investigators were waiting for a tow truck to take the charred shell of the getaway car back to the lab.

'That's the spa lady's . . .'

'She probably came out of there with her little disposable flip-flops . . . or flaming red upper lip . . . mascara under her eyes, desperate to get home before she met someone.'

Gary tuned Ren out a lot. But today, the radio wasn't even on. She stared out the window. The road was quiet, dusty, and bordered by pines, but if you looked through them, you could see where the wildfire had taken many of them away. They drove for fifteen minutes in silence; the type that only Gary could create – a very specific and dense one.

Breathe.

They rounded a bend onto Stoney Pass Road and drove a little further.

'Hey,' said Ren.

Gary had no reaction.

You are a very distracted man, lately. 'Slow down,' said Ren.

Up ahead, a white Hyundai Accent was parked at the side of the road. The passenger door was closed, the driver's door, half open.

'We could be in luck,' said Ren, sitting forward.

Gary slowed.

'Rental plates,' said Ren. 'Whoa, whoa, whoa . . . what the hell? That's a body . . .'

Gary cut the engine. They jumped out of the SUV and drew their weapons. Slowly, they walked toward the car.

'It's a woman,' said Ren.

She had been shot in the head at close range; there was little left of her face. She had also been shot in the chest, her ruined torso half out of the car; one arm dangling down, the ends of her pale brown hair trailing in the dirt.

'She hasn't been here long,' said Ren. She checked her watch. It was 15.48.

'One to the head, one to the chest,' said Gary.

'Looks like whoever shot her was standing in the open passenger door. Look at the spatter.'

Gary nodded.

'The glove box is open,' said Ren, 'maybe she was trying to get something out of there . . . a weapon . . . a purse . . . Or maybe the shooter was.'

'They tried to wipe it down,' said Gary. 'Carjacking?' he said. 'Could be connected to the robbery. The bandits ditched their car, flagged her down, maybe . . . didn't take the car because they were disturbed? Or panicked?'

'Would a woman pull over if she was alone?'

'Unless she wasn't alone . . .'

'Hey,' said Ren, pointing to the ground. 'Cell phone.'

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She put on gloves and picked it up. When she stood up, she looked into the car again. All at once, she could feel her heart lurch, her legs weaken, her stomach turn.

Oh, no. No. No. No.

She stared up at Gary. 'Jesus,' she said. 'She's pregnant.'