

The second novel in a sensational new series  
from the bestselling author of *Intern* and *Killer Body*

BONNIE HEARN HILL



Where is the line between love and obsession?

CUTLINE



# CUTLINE

BONNIE HEARN HILL

MIRA

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## CUTLINE

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"Hill gets the reader's attention with a contemporary issue (is slim the only way to be?), intriguing characters and clever plotting."

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*Also by BONNIE HEARN HILL*

**IF IT BLEEDS  
DOUBLE EXPOSURE  
KILLER BODY  
INTERN**

# CUTLINE

BONNIE HEARN HILL

MIRA



This book is dedicated with friendship,  
love and cool beans to Genevieve Choate.  
Thanks for helping me hear your world.





# One

## *The Fat Lady*

The cropping determines everything. Every newspaper person knows that.

CUTLINE: Golden Gate Park. Dawn. A shower of silver-green trees against a black, backlit sky. So solid that sky, so stable, in spite of its carefree life by day. You can trust it with anything, and so does the couple, leaning like two trees behind the shelter of the building. Oh, yes, there are structures in this open place. They are not the first lovers here. Earlier they dreamed themselves one within the walls of that small sanctuary. They breathed earth and each other. They laughed. But now, outside, he's changed, trying to go back to his other life, although she knows he wants only to be with her.

"We shouldn't have." His voice diffuses into the air, the words difficult to differentiate. Remorse drips like rain.

"Don't talk like that. You know you love me."



"Listen to me. You must listen." He puts out his hand, his sleeve draping darkness. "Why can't you hear me? I told you. I made a mistake."

The words tinkle like bells. Something's wrong. Someone's making him lie.

"Don't try to fool me, not after what we just did."

"I'm sorry. I really am."

He's afraid to look up, even in the dark. She notices the soft, pale spot of his head. She loves him in spite of it. Bald doesn't matter when two people love each other.

"You wanted it as much as I did. Can't you feel it, even now?"

He moves away, and she knows how difficult it must be for him, reaches out so that he knows it's okay. "I never meant to hurt you," he says. "I didn't know what was happening until it was too late."

His features fade. What is wrong? Why does everything desert her, dim at her touch, lose its appeal the moment she begins to love it?

No, push those thoughts away. Just look at this man. Even in the darkness, his eyes are coals of desire.

"You knew everything," she says. "You wanted everything. We *did* everything."

"I can't live with it. I've requested a transfer, confessed to someone I trust."

"Don't be silly, darling."

"I'm never going to see you again."

"Of course you are. Right here tomorrow night."

"No." She hates that word. "No." This time he stretches it out. Nooo.

He lifts his hand, then a flash of silver blinds her. Silver

so bright she cannot hide from it, slashing the night with its vicious blade.

Her lover topples at her feet. For one disoriented moment, she wonders what happened to him, then she looks down at the hideous slash on his throat, the thin red line, his twisted shadow, and remembers. Oh, no. Not this, not to this wonderful man, their wonderful love. She'd better do something about the razor.

CUTLINE: The body of San Francisco Priest David McCaffrey was discovered today in Golden Gate Park.

Crop out everything but the body. The cropping is everything.

Father, forgive me.



## Two

Geri

*Saturday*

I'd been standing outside the San Francisco Airport exactly twenty-two minutes when I realized Leta Blackburn wasn't coming to pick me up, after all. Crikey. The wormy feeling reminded me of something way back. Lots of somethings.

Some places make you feel loved. Some places make you feel lost. Some places make you feel nothing at all. As my mama might say, if we were on speaking terms right now—*So what did you expect? French fries on the side?*

My fellow passengers, long since claimed, had drifted away in a tide of bodies that crashed in and rolled out in some pre-determined rhythm. I looked at the clock. Twenty-three minutes. What next? I could phone Leta, but phones in noisy places pose some problems for me.

I could take a cab over there. I'd paid my share of the rent, hadn't I? Yes, a cab was the best idea. I spotted one and headed toward it, dragging my roller-queen suitcase behind me.

Leta probably had a good explanation for standing me up. Still, I've known lonely lots of different ways, and right then, standing at the airport, watching the last little brown-haired girl get scooped up into her grandma's arms, brought back every one of them.

The cab driver mumbled something I couldn't make out, as far back in the seat as I was. I leaned forward.

"I'm sorry. I can't hear you." He twisted farther around in the seat, and finally I could read his lips.

"You live here?"

I'm a lousy liar, almost compelled to tell the truth regarding the most trivial matters. Some would say that's a strength, but it works both ways. "Moving here," I said.

"SoMa?"

I thought back to high school, *Brave New World*, that drug that made everything okay, even when it wasn't.

He turned back to his driving, the rest of his question lost in traffic.

SoMa. South of Market. My new address, where I would find Leta, who'd in all sincerity explain how the time had just slipped away, even though we both knew this lady never let anything worthwhile escape her.

"It's my friend's place," I said. "Sister of a friend, actually. She's a reporter at the *Times*." The threadbare head pointed straight ahead at the up-and-down street. "Me, too," I added, as much for myself as for him. "I'm a reporter, too."

We skidded to a stoplight in time for him to turn to me



and say, "Reporter, huh? You hear about that chick reporter who disappeared?"

"What?" I must have squawked the words, because he turned back around even as the cab shot across the green. That's another thing about not being able to hear too well. You don't know the sound of your own voice.

The cab driver fumbled next to him and threw a section of the newspaper into the backseat, missing my lap by inches. "Read all about it," he said, and turned back to the road, laughing at his own joke.

From above the fold on B-1, Leta Blackburn looked up at me from a thumb-size photo imbedded in a column of type. Reporter Missing, read the headline. Last Interview With Actor Harry Miller.

Leta Blackburn, award-winning reporter. Who'd said I could stay with her until I could find a place of my own. Who'd agreed to show me the ropes at my new job. Who'd promised to keep my secret, because she understood. Leta. Missing. Last seen interviewing Harry Miller, the biggest nonrecovering druggie movie star in Hollywood. I hung on to the newspaper even after I realized my hands were shaking.

I could barely give the driver directions to the apartment. The story told me little, only that she'd been missing since Monday, following an interview with actor Harry Miller, fresh out of prison for not being able to rein in his self-abuses. Monday? Why hadn't somebody called me? What about her sister, Phyllis? Their mom? They weren't even due back from Europe until next month. Did they know?

I paid the cab driver and took my bags from him, facing the same double glass doors I'd seen last weekend when I'd

come to finalize our plan and check out the apartment. Only then, the entrance to the modern sixteen-story building had seemed elegant. Today it looked open, vulnerable, like a wound.

I felt like an intruder, but I had nowhere else to go. At least the slick plastic card I inserted into the outside lock still worked. I took the elevator to the twelfth floor and let myself in. Where was Leta? What should I do next? Before I could decide, I realized I was not alone in the apartment. Coming out of the bedroom that was to be mine was a man. Crikey. I screamed before he showed me his identification.

"Sorry if I startled you, ma'am."

I took a deep breath and realized how really close I was to losing it. "Startled, my ass," I managed. "What the hell's going on?"

I don't make a practice of swearing that early in the day, but this was an exception. The cop's unscrambled speech made me wonder if hysterical chicks were part of his beat the way the constant checking of facts, names and places had been to mine as a research geek.

"You must be Ms. LaRue," he said. "We found your e-mail."

My first thought was how dare he nose around through Leta's computer. My second was this was serious, not crossed wires, not missed communication. Leta really was missing. For the first time in my life, I contemplated the meaning of that word. "I left several," I said. "Tried her on the phone, too."

"Your message is on the answering machine." He glanced at the TDY device on the white-tile bar, the sleek silver-tone telephone beside it. "She had several from her sister, as well." A short piece of paper, like adding-machine tape, stuck up



from the machine. If there had been messages from Phyllis, the cops had taken the printouts.

"She's in Europe. With Virginia, their mom."

"We were trying to contact them at their Los Angeles number. Haven't been able to reach her or the mother." Not Leta's mother. *The* mother. They'd already been reduced to crime stats.

"Leta has their itinerary around here somewhere."

"We haven't been able to find it."

"I have their cell phone number, too. Don't know if you'll have any luck with an international call."

"Haven't gotten much so far."

Another officer joined us in the tiny kitchen with its expansive view of the city and the glimpse of blue beyond. Their names were Marshall and Warren. Marshall, the dark one, spoke with a heavy accent of some kind and had a mustache like what Mama would call a sweep broom over his upper lip, making it even more difficult for me to read him.

"Did she answer your e-mail?" he said.

Texas, I thought. That was the origin of his speech. I can do Texas pretty well. My mama's people are from there. "No, but I was traveling. Had to take my dog to a friend's. He's bringing him next month."

"When was the last time you saw her?" Warren, the muscular blonde, had a clear voice I had little problem discerning. One of those teacher voices.

"Last weekend. I came up to look at the apartment, pay my share of the rent."

Marshall's eyes lit as if he'd caught me in a lie. I knew he was taking in my purple hair and matching clogs. The familiar