

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

LISA
JACKSON

DEEP
FREEZE

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WATCHING JENNA

Tonight, with the snow so heavy, he was forced inside, to watch Jenna via monitor, and as he did, he felt nausea attack. He was hot, itching from the inside out. Furious, he kicked a paint can and sent it reeling, the red color splashing the walls. He barely noticed.

She was with another man.

Kissing.

Touching.

His pulse pounded, throbbed through his brain, and he felt betrayal of the worst kind. Didn't she know that only *he* could satisfy her? His shrine to her was nearly complete—and this was how she repaid him, by acting like a common tramp for the sheriff.

Shane Carter, a man who had vowed to uphold the law—and there he was, stripping off her clothes, running his tongue and hands over her skin. And she let him.

His Jenna.

She let him!

Rage burned through him, and he plotted all kinds of satisfying revenge, but he could not abandon his plan. Not now. Precision was key.

He watched them make love, and his rage grew cold as the night. How long had he worked for this? For years.

He and Jenna were meant to be together. There were no coincidences. His life was meant to be entwined with hers, and everything he did was for Jenna.

Always for Jenna . . .

Books by Lisa Jackson

SEE HOW SHE DIES

INTIMACIES

WISHES

WHISPERS

TWICE KISSED

UNSPOKEN

IF SHE ONLY KNEW

HOT BLOODED

COLD BLOODED

THE NIGHT BEFORE

THE MORNING AFTER

DEEP FREEZE

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PROLOGUE

Last Winter

Unmoving, she waited.

As if she sensed he was near.

He could feel it—that throb of desire between them as he looked across a dimly illuminated expanse to the bed where she lay in semidarkness. Jenna Hughes. The woman of his dreams. The single female he'd lived his life for. So close. And in his bed. Finally in his bed.

And he was ready. Oh God, he was ready. Sweat began to bead on his upper lip and forehead. His cock was stiffening, his nerve endings dancing.

The lamps were turned low, a few night-lights giving the large room an intimate atmosphere of shadows and fuzzy, muted corners. Soft music, the romantic score from the movie *Beneath the Shadows*, whispered through the cold, cavernous room. His breath fogged as he stared at her in the sexy black teddy he'd bought for her. So nice that she'd decided to wear it for this special tryst. Their first.

Good girl.

The silk and lace had fit perfectly, sculpting her body. Just as he'd known it would.

He caught a glimpse of her breasts through the sheer fab-

ric. Dark nipples looked nearly wet as they peeked through the lace. Had she moistened them for him? In eager expectation?

Beautiful.

He smiled inwardly, knowing that she was as eager as he was.

How long had he anticipated this moment? He couldn't remember. It didn't matter. The time was now. The pills and vodka he'd swallowed had kicked in and he was working on the perfect buzz—just enough chemicals to make this moment even better.

"I'm here," he told her quietly, expecting her to turn her head, arch one of those delicate black eyebrows, and cast him a come-hither look. Or perhaps she would rise on one elbow and slowly crook a finger toward him, silently drawing him closer, her silvery-green gaze holding his.

But she didn't move. Not one strand of ebony-colored hair shifted. She just lay on the bed and stared upward.

That was wrong.

He froze.

She should look his way. That was what he wanted.

"Jenna?" he called quietly.

Nothing. Not so much as a flicker of a glance in his direction.

What was the matter with her? Dressed like a damned harlot, she acted as if she didn't care that he was near, that this night was special to her. To him. To *them*.

Not again!

His back teeth ground together in frustration at her cool disinterest. Was it a game? Was she teasing him? Just what the hell was going on here?

"Jenna, look at me," he commanded in a near-whisper.

But as he edged closer, he realized that she wasn't as perfect as he'd thought. No . . . her makeup wasn't quite right. Her lipstick was too pale, her eyeshadow barely visible. He'd wanted her to look more like a whore. That was the plan. Hadn't he told her to play the part of a prostitute? *Isn't she dressed as a prostitute? Isn't this part of your fantasy?*

Damn, he couldn't think straight. His mind wasn't as clear as he'd hoped. Probably the drugs . . . or was it something else? Something vital? Jenna wasn't responding the way he'd hoped.

She knew what he liked.

But then, she'd always been defiant. Always aloof. Icily so. That was part of his attraction to her.

"Come on, baby," he whispered, deciding to give her another chance, though he was having trouble focusing. Maybe he was a little too high and he wasn't seeing those little nuances of lust that she was known for. That was it. His mind was a little too cloudy, his thoughts not quite joined, his lust overtaking reason. He was quivering inside, and his lungs felt constricted. His erection was rock-hard, straining against his fly, but the images in his mind were a little blurry.

He licked his lips. No more waiting.

He placed a knee on the bed beside her, and the mattress creaked loudly.

Still she refused to look at him.

"Jenna!" he said more sharply than he'd intended, his temper catching fire, his tongue a little thick.

Take it easy. She's here, isn't she?

"Jenna, look at me!"

Not so much as a flinch.

Stubborn, thankless woman! After all he'd done for her! All the years he'd thought of no one but her! Rage burned through his blood, and his hands began to shake.

Calm down! You can still have her. In your bed. She hasn't moved away, has she?

"Jenna, I'm here," he said.

She ignored him.

Fury blazed white-hot, but he tried to fight his anger. This was her game, that was all. She knew that the more she pretended disinterest, the more he would want her, the higher the erotic stakes. And that was all the better.

Wasn't it?

He didn't know. Couldn't really remember.

He was sweating though it was cold in here, the tempera-

ture hovering only a few degrees above freezing. And yet he was hot inside, a fire raging through his blood.

Didn't she feel it—the intimate bond that tethered them together?

He leaned closer, and with a trembling finger traced the outline of her cheek. It was warm to his touch.

Then he understood. This was all part of *her* fantasy. She wanted him to think of her not as Jenna Hughes, but as one of the roles she'd played on the big screen. Wasn't she dressed as Paris Knowlton, a New Orleans prostitute in *Beneath the Shadows*? Hadn't he wanted Jenna to act like Paris tonight? Isn't that exactly what she was doing? Suddenly he felt better, the warmth running through his veins due to lust and drugs rather than rage.

"Paris," he cooed, touching her dark hair lovingly. It shimmered a blue-black in the shadowy lights. "I've been searching for you."

Still no response.

Jesus, what did she want? He was playing *his* part . . . or was he?

"Jenna?"

Not so much as a glance his way. Anger sparked. It tore through him, his blood suddenly thundering in his ears. "Oh, I get it," he snarled, his fingers roughly grazing her neck. "You're really into this, aren't you? You *like* acting like a whore."

He heard a gasp.

Finally!

His fingers surrounded her throat. It was warm to his touch. Pliant. He tried to feel her pulse as his hands pressed against her skin.

A groan.

Pain or desire?

"That's it, isn't it? You like it when I'm rough, don't you?"

"Oh God, no!" Her voice seemed to come from a distance, echoing in his head, bouncing off the walls. "Don't!"

His grip tightened, sinking into her nearly hot flesh.

"Stop! Please! What are you doing?"

He was so hard he was trembling, but he couldn't take his hands from her neck, couldn't unzip his fly. He shook her then and her head wobbled wildly, beautiful green eyes fixed straight at him.

A terrified scream ripped through the room.

Jenna's head fell backward.

Her neck wobbled in his hands.

Another horrified, panicked shriek ricocheted off the rafters, the sound echoing through his brain.

"Bitch!" He slapped her hard.

Smack! Her face twisted hard to one side.

"Oh God!" There was crying now. Sobbing. "No, no, no!"

Her makeup began to run, her perfect features distorting from the blow. Her hair came loose, the thick black wig falling onto the ruffled mattress, her bald pate visible in the dusky room.

A gasp.

Her head twisted to one side.

That was better.

He raised his hand again.

"Don't . . . oh God, please don't!" she pled from immobile lips. "What're you doing?" She was wailing violently, nearly incoherently, panic stretching her vocal cords. But her shoulders remained stiff. Inflexible. Her face without any passion.

Something was wrong here, very wrong . . .

"Oh God, oh God, oh God . . . please stop."

The sound of fear, the gulping, gasping sobs, reverberated through the room, yet no tears fell from Jenna's eyes, nor did they blink. Her lips didn't tremble. Her shoulders didn't shake. Her body didn't convulse . . .

He blinked. Cleared his head. His erection softened as he realized where he was and realized what he was doing.

Hell!

He stared down at Jenna Hughes, and as if his hands were burned, dropped her onto the mussed silk sheets.

Crack!

Her head hit the bed frame.

A shriek of pure terror ripped through the room.

Jenna's neck snapped.

Her bald head fell away from her body.

"Oh God, nooooooooooooo!"

Eyes wide, the head rolled off the mattress.

With a dull thud, her skull landed on the concrete floor of this, his sanctuary.

The screams became hysterical, violent, horrible sobs that tore through the chamber, bouncing off the walls and climbing up his spine.

"Oh God! Please, don't!" Her voice seemed to echo to the rooftop. So she *could* feel. And yet she wasn't looking at him. Something was wrong here . . . very wrong.

On the floor, Jenna's features compressed and flattened in the ooze that had once been her face.

His mind cleared.

He realized that his near-perfect creation, his waxen mask of Jenna Hughes's gorgeous face, was destroyed.

Because he hadn't been able to wait.

Because he'd taken too many pills.

Because he wanted her so badly that he'd lost his judgment and slapped her. Long before her likeness had hardened.

"Fool," he ground out and slapped himself alongside the head. "Idiot!" All that work for nothing. The beautiful face—could it be reconstructed? Where once it had been nearly lifelike, now it was goo; once a Michelangelo, now a Picasso, her beautiful features distorted as they pooled around sightless eyes that were glassy and stark.

He leaned back, away from the mess on the bed. There was no blood. No flesh and bone. Not from this lifeless form. Swiping the sweat away from his forehead, he glanced across the shadowed expanse to his darkened stage, already set, where several near-perfect mannequins stood silently waiting in the gloom. They were beautiful, if not alive. Replicas of Jenna Hughes.

But this one! He looked again at what had once been his

masterpiece and frowned. A pathetic imitation! He'd been distracted lately.

"Please . . . let me go."

He rocked back onto his feet and looked over his shoulder to the murky corner. His eyes focused on the live woman, bound and naked, just waking up from a drug-induced slumber. Hers had been the voice he'd heard. Her terror was the emotion that had rippled through the room.

"Please . . ." she mewled again softly, and he smiled, feeling a renewed hope as he surveyed her musculature and facial features. The width of the forehead, the straight nose, the high cheekbones beneath big, frightened eyes. She was a dirty blond, but hair color was the least of his worries. Facially she was a near-match. His grin stretched wide, and the mess on the floor was instantly forgotten.

His next replica of Jenna Hughes would be perfect.

This pathetic creature, bound and begging for her life, was anatomically correct.

His anger subsided in an instant as he glanced to one window, where the barest hint of moonlight slipped through the panes. Snow was melting on the outer sill.

Winter was slipping away.

The spring thaw was already in the air.

He'd have to work fast.

CHAPTER 1

This Winter

“So you’re concerned about the coming storm,” Dr. Randall said calmly from the chair near his desk. He’d positioned his body so that there was nothing between himself and his client but an imported rug covering the polished wooden floor of his office.

“I’m concerned about the winter.” The response was angry, but coldly so. The man, tall and taciturn, sat near the window on a padded leather chair. He stared straight at Randall with a hard, unforgiving gaze.

Randall nodded, as if he understood. “You’re concerned, because—?”

“You know why. It seems that things always get worse when the temperature drops.”

“At least for you.”

“Right. For me. Isn’t that why I’m here?” Tension was evident in the stiffness of his neck and the bleached knuckles of his clasped hands.

“Why are you here?”

“Don’t patronize me. None of that psychobabble double-talk.”

“Do you hate the winter?”

A beat. A second's hesitation. The client blinked. "Not at all. Hate's a pretty strong word."

"What would you say? What would be the right word?"

"It's not the season I don't like. It's what happens."

"Maybe your concern about things being worse at this time of year is just your perception."

"Do you deny that bad things happen in the winter?"

"Of course not, but sometimes accidents or tragedies can occur in other months. People drown while swimming in the summer, or fall off cliffs while hiking in the mountains, or become ill from parasites that only breed in the heat. Bad things can happen at any time."

His client's jaw became solid granite as he seemed to struggle silently with the concept. He was a very intelligent man, his IQ near genius level, but he was struggling to make sense of the tragedy that had scarred his life. "I do *know* that intellectually, but personally, it's always worse in the winter." He glanced to the window, where gray clouds were muddying the sky.

"Because of what happened when you were a child?"

"You tell me. You're the shrink." He cut a harsh glance at the psychologist before offering a bit of a smile, a quick flash of teeth that Dr. Randall supposed would be considered a killer smile by most women. This man was an interesting case, made more so by the pact that they had agreed upon: There would be no notes, no recording, not so much as a memo about the appointment in Randall's date book to indicate that the two had ever met. The appointment was cloaked in the deepest secrecy.

His client glanced at the clock, reached into his back pocket, and pulled out his wallet. He didn't count out the bills. They were already neatly folded and tucked into a special compartment.

"We should meet again soon," Dr. Randall suggested as the money was left on a corner of his desk.

The tall man nodded sharply. "I'll call."

And he would, Dr. Randall thought, idly pressing the fold from the crisp twenties as his patient's boots rang down the

steps of the back staircase. For no matter how hard the man tried to convince himself he didn't need counseling, he was smart enough to realize that the demons he was trying to exorcise had burrowed deep into the darkest parts of his soul and wouldn't be released without the proper coaxing, the treatment he so abhorred.

Pride goeth before a fall, Randall thought as he slipped the bills into his own worn wallet. He'd seen it time and time again. This man, though he didn't know it, was about to tumble.

"Dad-gum dog—where the hell did ya run off ta now?" Charley Perry said around a wad of chewing tobacco. He was tramping through the wilderness, high above the Columbia, through old-growth timber and little else as the first light of dawn splintered through the trees. Winter was chasing down the gorge, and his stupid, two-bit spaniel had taken off again. He considered leaving her out here—she'd probably find her way back to his cabin—but a bit of guilt nagged at him, and truth to tell, she was all he really had in the world. Tanzy had once been a helluva huntin' dog, Charley mused, but like himself, she was half-deaf now and more than a little crippled with arthritis.

Squinting through the sparse brush, he whistled sharply, the sound piercing its way through the forest as branches rattled overhead. His gloved hands tightened over the barrel of his rifle, a Winchester that his daddy had bestowed upon him over half a century earlier when he'd returned from the war. He had newer weapons, a lot of them, but this one, like the tired old dog, was his favorite.

Damn, he thought, but he was gettin' nostalgic in his old age.

"Tanzy?" he called, knowing that he was chasing off any chance of prey. *Stupid bitch of a dog!*

He stomped up a familiar trail, his gaze scanning the ground for signs of deer, or elk, or even a bear, though they'd already gone into their dens for the winter. There had been