

BARRY HOFFMAN

Bram Stoker Award Nominee

EYES OF PREY



"An urban nightmare for the millennium." —Ramsey Campbell

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"Eyes of Prey is a compelling novel with an unpredictable plot that's rich in detail and peopled with fully fleshed characters you care about."

—F. Paul Wilson

Lysette had seen it all. As a child, she had witnessed her parents' gruesome murder, and as an adult, she had seen men leering at her as she worked the strip clubs. But that night in the subway, the night she shot the mugger, she saw something else. She saw the mugger, dying and bleeding, at her feet. And she saw her mission in life. That night, the Nightwatcher was born. That night, the terror began.

*"Fans of suspense will cheer *Eyes of Prey*. Hoffman skillfully unfolds the action, leaving readers impatient for his next."*

—Booklist

Barry Hoffman burst onto the scene with *Hungry Eyes*, a stunning debut that was nominated for both a Bram Stoker Award and an International Horror Guild Award. Now he takes us even deeper into the world of horror—a world of vengeance and of pity, of the natural and of the supernatural. A world in which the predator can be seen most clearly through the eyes of prey.

"Hoffman's characterization transcends the simpleminded killing machines who populate the genre."

—Publishers Weekly



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BARRY HOFFMAN

EYES
OF
PREY

LEISURE BOOKS



NEW YORK CITY

*With love, respect and gratitude
to my children—
Dara, David and Cheryl*

A LEISURE BOOK®

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THE NIGHTWATCHER

"What's a fine looking bitch doing out this time of night?" he asked, his eyes taking stock of Lysette's skirt, which had risen high up her thigh, then checking out the cleavage exposed by her low-cut top, and finally the gold cross that dangled between her breasts.

"It's no business of yours what I'm doing," she said evenly, dropping her cigarette to the ground, and calmly crushing the embers with her shoe.

"A feisty one. I like that in a woman. We could have a good time," he said, his hand rubbing his crotch.

"I don't think so." Her eyes locked with his.

"Bitch," he said. Then he smiled. "I don't have to fight for pussy. Tell you what. Give me that fine jewelry and you can be on your way."

"Why would I give you my fucking jewelry?" she asked, without emotion, and saw a cloud of doubt cross the man's face for a moment.

He'd been moving steadily toward her as he spoke, and now his hand touched the gold cross, his palm resting on her breast. She heard the click of a switchblade, which he held up to her face. He wasn't smiling anymore. She saw cockiness, arrogance and determination.

"So I won't cut you," he answered. "I'm going to get the jewelry one way or another. Matter of fact, I don't give a fuck whether I take it from you dead or alive. Your choice, bitch."

Lysette stepped back, raised the arm covered by her coat, exposing her gun, which she fired once at the man's head.

Other *Leisure* books by Barry Hoffman:
HUNGRY EYES

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EYES PREY

Prologue

What I'd give to be a fly on the wall . . .

Lysette's father had used the expression all too often during the three-hour conversations his thirteen-year-old daughter, Laura, had on the phone. *Now* she knew what he'd meant; lying on a hospital bed in a coma, she *was* a fly on the wall. Sitting . . .

—*cowering*

. . . in the attic of her mind, too weary . . .

—*too terrified*

. . . to venture out, as the nurses and doctors talked about her ordeal as if she weren't there. And she listened . . .

—*a fly on the wall.*

"Animals. Goddamn animals."

She recognized the voice as LaToya, relieving Heather. If it was LaToya, it must be morning, Lysette thought to herself.

"Look at the poor child," she heard the woman say, her voice husky and filled with concern. "I heard Dr. Paul say she was hit upside the head with a marble ashtray or lighter. Same as her sister. Don't know if it's a curse or a blessing she wasn't killed like the others. Could end up a vegetable . . ."

Images floated past her as Lysette peeked out the attic door, tuning out the nurse's patter. Pat's Steaks. They had gone to dinner—the four of them. Mom. Dad. Her big sister, Laura. And Lysette, two years younger than her sister. Once a week they'd all go out for dinner. More often than not, it was to Pat's Steaks; the *best* Philly cheese steaks in the city. Laura covered hers with onions.

"Some steak with your onions?" her mother joked.

Lysette passed on the onions and slathered mustard over hers, to her sister's consternation.

"Yuck! Mustard. You put mustard on *everything*."

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"Do not."

"Do, too. Lysette puts mustard on her cereal, Mom," she said, ignoring her sister.

"Do not, onion breath."

"That's enough, girls," her mother admonished, not too sternly, as she tried unsuccessfully to stifle a smile.

The attic door closed abruptly, and Lysette could hear LaToya speaking again.

"Heard the police talk when she was brought in. Poor child was beaten and left for dead with the rest of her family. Was found lying under her mother *twelve* hours after they was attacked."

"Good thing she was comatose," Heather, the night nurse, answered. "Imagine being conscious with the rest of your family bludgeoned to death."

Lysette *had* been awake. *Had* been aware. She had tried to move, but couldn't, lying beneath her mother. Saw her father with his throat slashed, his head bent back at an impossible angle. Felt her mother's blood seeping through her blouse. Saw the dent in Laura's head that reminded her of the top of a bowling pin. Smelled the blood and urine and number two . . .

—"Stool," her mother would call it.

—"My morning constitutional," her father labeled it, going into the bathroom with the morning paper.

—"Crap" or "shit," Laura told her. "Gotta take a shit," Laura liked to say lately.

. . . and something more she couldn't identify right then.

—*Death*, her mind screamed now.

It was then she crept into the attic of her mind, hardly aware when she was lifted, put on a moving bed . . .

—"stretcher, you fool," she could hear Laura chastise her for her ignorance.

. . . and carried from the house.

There was a rustle of paper, then LaToya was talking again. "You haven't seen this yet, have you?"

It must be the *Daily News*, Lysette thought. Every morning LaToya brought in the tabloid, which for the last two days had been trying to piece together the crime which had shaken the city.

"The paper quotes an unidentified police source saying they are considering the possibility of a triple murder, with the distraught father committing suicide."

"Right. The father kills his family, *then* slits his throat, *then* dis-

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poses of the knife. Police source, my ass. Probably some secretary. Give me a break."

"More likely the dude from the paper had *no* police source," La-Toya added. "Made up the story to see if the police would refute it. Just out to sell papers. God, they make me sick."

More pictures, as Lysette peered from the safety of the attic into her memory. Dad opening the door. A man—a stranger—in the living room. Another behind the door grabbed Laura, put a knife to her throat. For the life of her she couldn't make out their faces. The harder she tried the more blurry they became, as if a fog had rolled in.

The man in the living room grabbed her and told everyone to keep quiet . . .

—"Shut your fucking mouths or we'll cut their throats."

. . . and sit on the sofa. The other man made Dad sit in the easy chair that faced the sofa, and began questioning him.

"Where does the bitch keep her fucking jewelry; the *good* stuff?"

She saw Dad telling him they didn't have any expensive jewelry, just his wife's engagement and wedding ring. The man—angry now—hit Dad in the face.

"Wrong answer, shithead. Gimme your wallet."

The man rifled through the contents, took out some bills and flung the wallet across the room.

"Forty-two fucking dollars! Now don't tell me that's all you keep in the house. You don't want to make me angry. Where's the safe?"

"There is no safe," her father said, slurring his words, as blood streamed down his chin.

The man hit her father again.

"Wrong again, asshole. People like you always got safes. Give it up, man. You don't want us fucking with your wife or daughters, do you, now?"

The images came faster, almost in a blur. Lysette didn't like this game of reliving that night like a full-length movie. She willed everything to move faster. She wanted to close her eyes, but she had to see *everything* . . . over and over.

One of the men hitting her mother while the other yelled at her father.

The man ripping her mother's blouse off, pushing her down on the couch on top of both her and Laura, pulling something out of his pants . . .

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—"His penis, stupid," Laura would have admonished, but now she was crying.

... and sticking it into her mother.

They were having sex, she thought to herself. Why were they having sex?

—"Fucking," Laura would have corrected her, just like on some of the movies on HBO she wasn't supposed to watch. When she'd question Laura, her older sister explained patiently about *making love*. Lately, though, she'd tired of the endless questions and told Lysette to close her eyes. "They're fucking now. You're too young to see." Lysette ignored her, of course.

The man with her father yelling at him so loud, she wondered why the neighbors didn't hear.

"Do it man. Finish her off. Show this asshole we're not fucking around."

Lysette, frozen with fear, saw the other man holding her mother. Yanking her head back. Drawing a knife across her neck. Blood, like a blanket unfolding, covering her mother's chest.

Laura screaming. Trying to run. The man who cut her mother grabbing her hair from the back. He held the knife in front of her face. Laura bit him and the knife slipped from his grasp. Cursing, he picked up a lighter made of marble...

—The one Laura dropped on the glass table when she'd decided to smoke her first cigarette; the glass cracking, looking like a jigsaw puzzle.

... and hit her on the head three, four, five times until Laura stopped screaming. Stopped crying. *Stopped moving*.

"Last chance, asshole. Where's the safe?" the other yelled at her father.

Her father mumbled something Lysette couldn't make out, but saw it angered the man.

"Do the other bitch," he yelled to his friend. "Let this shit see them all die."

Lysette was huddled against her mother, her mother's blood covering the right side of Lysette's face and dripping into her eye so she had trouble seeing. The man with the marble lighter...

—Red eyes. He had red eyes. Or was it the blood in *her* eyes distorting everything?

... grabbed her by her sweater and swung the hand with the lighter at her head, hitting her just above her eye.

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Woozy. She felt woozy. And nauseous, like she was going to throw up.

Saw him lift his hand in what seemed like slow motion to hit her again. Instinctively, she moved slightly to the left and his hand came crashing down on her temple.

Mama who had been still . . .

—*Dead.*

. . . all of a sudden was crawling to cover her.

"What the fuck?" she heard the man say, then saw him hit her mother with the lighter. Again and again. Then the lights seemed to go out and everything was quiet.

When Lysette opened her eyes the men were gone. She saw her father sitting in the chair, his throat slit like her mother's; his white Phillies shirt crimson. The gash in his neck smiled at her.

"Are you happy, Lysette?" she thought the new mouth said. "Didn't we have fun, tonight?"

"Are you happy."

"Are you happy . . ."

"happy . . . happy . . . happy . . ."

It was then she crawled into the attic of her mind. Anything to get away from that voice.

Back in the hospital, Lysette heard Dr. Paul. He came by every day after Heather left. Sometimes alone; usually with other doctors . . .

—*Residents*, Dr. Paul had said once.

"How's our patient, today?" Dr. Paul asked LaToya, as he felt her wrist, then shined a light in each of her eyes.

"Same-o. Same-o. Will she ever come out of it, Dr. Paul?"

Today he was alone. He and LaToya talked as if she weren't there.

—*A fly on the wall.*

"As a neurologist, LaToya, yes, she should. Her head looks like a cracked egg, but it's superficial damage. She'll have scars, but there appears to be no serious brain damage. Won't know for sure, though, until she wakes up. She's still in shock. She's got to want to wake up. And that's easier said than done."

—*Don't want to wake up*, Lysette wanted to shout.

"I'll be praying for her, Dr. Paul," LaToya said.

"You do that," he answered. His voice sounded far away. He must be leaving the room, Lysette thought.

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Still later another man entered.

"Morning, officer," LaToya said. She sounded a bit fearful, Lysette thought. It must be the policeman who stopped by each day. LaToya didn't like the police. She told Heather and Sara, the afternoon nurse, they made her feel like she had something to hide. She'd become angry, though, when the man asked if Lysette was faking.

"Now why would she be faking? You think she up and killed her parents and sister, then hit herself upside the head? You want her to wake up so you can arrest her? She'll wake when she's good and ready. Leastways, that's what Dr. Paul says. Then you can arrest her."

"No one's going to arrest the child. We *would* like to question her. Get a description, you know, of her attackers."

"You leave this child alone and go do your job. When she wakes up, last thing she needs is a policeman barking questions at her. . . ."

Lysette was bored. Every day it was the same with these two. Every day it was the same with *everything*. She could wake up. *Should* wake up. But she didn't want to answer his questions. Didn't want to tell him she couldn't describe the men who attacked her family. He'd think she was a baby. Anyway, when she thought about waking up she'd hear another voice in her mind.

—*Don't leave me, Lysette. Come and find me and we can play.*

She thought it must be Laura, and she couldn't leave Laura. But try as she might, she couldn't find the voice in the attic they shared. She'd looked all over, but the voice never stayed in the same place long enough for Lysette to locate it. It was just like Laura to play the tease.

Finally, after a few weeks, Laura, or whoever it was, left. Lysette heard the attic door open and close. She was alone, and soon the movie would begin again. She didn't want to see it alone. Didn't want to see it *at all*.

So four weeks after the attack she left the attic and rejoined the world.