

VIOLETS ARE BLUE



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#1 BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *ROSES ARE RED*

Violets Are Blue

A NOVEL BY

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*This is for my friend Kyle Craig, who doesn't work
for the FBI but who has, I think, a really cool name.*

I should mention a few other patrons of the arts:

Jim Heekin, Mary Jordan, Fern Galperin,

Maria Pugatch, Irene Markocki, Barbara Groszewski,

Tony Peyser, and my sweet Suzie.

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Prologue

WITHOUT ANY WARNING

Chapter 1

NOTHING EVER STARTS where we think it does. So of course this doesn't begin with the vicious and cowardly murder of an FBI agent and good friend named Betsey Cavaliere. I only thought that it did. My mistake, and a really big and painful one.

I arrived at Betsey's house in Woodbridge, Virginia, in the middle of the night. I'd never been there before, but I didn't have any trouble finding it. The FBI and EMS were already there. There were flashing red and yellow lights everywhere, seeming to paint the lawn and front porch with bright, dangerous streaks.

I took a deep breath and walked inside. My sense of balance was off. I was reeling. I acknowledged a tall blond FBI agent I knew named Sandy Hammonds. I could see that Sandy had been crying. She was a friend of Betsey's.

On a hallway table I saw Betsey's service revolver. Beside it was a printed reminder for her next shooting qualifier at the FBI range. The irony stung.

I forced myself to walk down a long hallway that led from the living room to the back of the house. The house looked to be close to a hundred years old and was filled with the kind of country clutter that she'd loved. The master bedroom was situated at the end of the hall.

I knew instantly that the murder had happened in there. The FBI techs and the local police were swarming around the open door like angry wasps near a threatened hive. The house was strangely, eerily quiet. This was as bad as it gets, worse than anything else. Ever.

Another one of my partners was dead.

The second one brutally murdered in two years.

And Betsey had been much more than just a partner.

How could this have happened? What did it mean?

I saw Betsey's small body sprawled on the hardwood floor and I went cold. My hand flew to my face, a reflex I had no control over.

The killer had stripped off her nightclothes. I didn't see them anywhere in the bedroom. The lower body was coated with blood. He'd used a knife. He'd punished Betsey with it. I desperately wanted to cover her, but I knew I couldn't.

Betsey's brown eyes were staring up at me, but they saw nothing. I remembered kissing those eyes and that sweet face. I remembered Betsey's laugh, high-pitched and musical. I stood there for a long time, mourning Betsey, missing her terribly. I wanted to turn away, but I didn't. I just couldn't leave her like this.

As I stood there in the bedroom, trying to figure out

something coherent about Betsey's murder, the cell phone in my jacket pocket went off. I jumped. I grabbed it, but then I hesitated. I didn't want to answer.

"Alex Cross," I finally spoke into the receiver.

I heard a machine-filtered voice and it cut right through me. I shuddered against my will.

"I *know* who this is and I even know where you are. At poor, dear, *butchered* Betsey's. Do you feel a little bit like a puppet on a string, Detective? You should," said the Mastermind. "Because that's what you are. You're my favorite puppet, in fact."

"Why did you kill her?" I asked the monster. "You didn't have to do this."

He laughed a mechanical laugh and the hairs on the back of my neck stood up. "You ought to be able to figure that out, no? You're the famous Detective Alex Cross. You have all those big, important cases notched on your belt. You caught Gary Soneji, Casanova. You solved Jack and Jill. Christ, you're impressive."

I spoke in a low voice. "Why don't you come after me right now? How about tonight? As you say, you know where I am."

The Mastermind laughed again, quietly, almost under his breath. "How about I kill your grandmother and your three kids tonight? I know where *they* are too. You left your partner with them, didn't you? You think he can stop me? John Sampson doesn't have a chance against me."

I hung up and ran out of the house in Woodbridge. I called Sampson in Washington and he picked up on the second ring.

"Everything okay there?" I gasped.

JAMES PATTERSON

“Everything’s fine, Alex. No problems here. You don’t sound too good, though. What’s up? What happened?”

“He said he’s coming for you and Nana and the kids,” I told John. “The Mastermind.”

“Not going to happen, sugar. Nobody will get past me. I hope to hell he tries.”

“Be careful, John. I’m on my way back to Washington *right now*. Please be careful. He’s crazy. He didn’t just kill Betsey, he defiled her.”

I ended the call with Sampson and I sprinted full-out toward my old Porsche.

The cell phone rang again before I got to the car.

“Cross,” I answered, still running as I spoke, trying to steady the phone against my chin and ear.

It was him again. He was laughing maniacally. “You can relax, Dr. Cross. I can hear your labored breathing. I’m not going to hurt them tonight. I was just fucking with you. Having some fun at your expense.

“You’re running, aren’t you? Keep running, Dr. Cross. But you won’t be fast enough. You can’t get away from me. It’s you I want. You’re next, Dr. Cross.”

Part One

THE CALIFORNIA MURDERS

Chapter 2

UNITED STATES ARMY LIEUTENANT Martha Wiatt and her boyfriend, Sergeant Davis O'Hara, moved at a fast pace as the evening fog began to roll in like a sulfurous cloud across Golden Gate Park in San Francisco. The couple looked sleek, even beautiful, in the waning light of day.

Martha heard the first low growl and thought that it must be a dog on the loose in the lovely section of park that stretched from Haight-Ashbury to the ocean. It came from far enough behind them that she wasn't worried.

"The Big Dawg!" she kidded Davis as they jogged up a steep hill that offered a stellar view of the stunning suspension bridge connecting San Francisco to Marin County. "Big Dawg" was a pet expression they used for everything oversized — from jetliners to sexual apparatus to very large canines.

Soon the thick fog would blanket the bridge and bay completely, but for now it was a gorgeous sight, incomparable, one of their favorite things in San Francisco.

“I love this run, that beautiful bridge, the sunset — the whole ball of wax,” Martha said in a steady, relaxed cadence. “But enough bad poetry. It’s time for me to kick your well-formed, athletic-looking butt, O’Hara.”

“That sounds like cheap-shot female chauvinism to me,” he grunted, but he was grinning, showing off some of the whitest teeth she had ever seen, or run her tongue across.

Martha kicked her pace up a notch. She’d been a cross-country star at Pepperdine University and she was still in great shape. “And that sounds like the beginnings of a gracious loser’s speech,” she said.

“We’ll see about that, won’t we? Loser buys at the Abbey.”

“I can already taste a Dos Equis. Mmm-mmm good.”

Suddenly the two runners’ playful exchange was interrupted by a much louder growl. It was closer too.

It didn’t seem possible that a dog had covered so much ground so fast. Maybe there were a couple of Big Dawgs loose in the area.

“There aren’t any cats in this park?” David asked. “I mean, like a *mountain* lion variety of cats?”

“No. Of course not. Get real, pal. We’re in San Francisco, not the middle of Montana.” Martha shook her head. Moisture jumped off her close-cropped reddish-brown hair. Then she thought she heard footsteps. *A runner and a large dog?*

“Let’s get out of these woods, okay?” Davis asked.

“I hear you. I don’t necessarily disagree. Last one to the parking lot is dog chow.”

“Not funny, Lieutenant Martha. Bad joke. This is getting a little spooky.”

“I don’t know about big cats around these parts, but I think I just spotted a little pussy.”

Another loud growl — and it was really close. Right on the heels of the two of them. Gaining ground fast.

“C’mon! Let’s go. Let’s move it,” said Martha Wiatt. She was a little afraid now, running as fast as she could, and that was very fast.

Another eerie growl pierced the gathering fog.