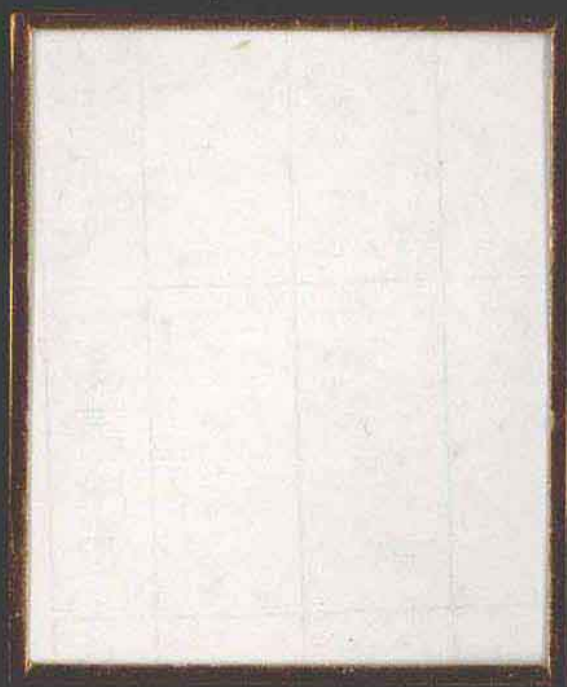


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JUPITER'S BONES

A PETER DECKER AND RINA LAZARUS NOVEL

**FAYE
KELLERMAN**

**JUPITER'S
BONES**

A PETER DECKER AND RINA LAZARUS NOVEL



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One man
Many followers
And the foulest of deeds.



**Praise for FAYE KELLERMAN
and her most recent
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JUPITER'S BONES

“Suspenseful . . . fast-paced . . . richly textured . . . realistic conflicts . . . It’s a relief to be invited back to the Decker household.”

Ft. Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel

“Kellerman’s novels sustain a quality that is unusually high for a longtime series, often surpassing some of the excellent thrillers written by her husband, Jonathan . . . She imbues each [character] with a personality and a private agenda. And she continues to add even more depth to Decker’s homicide team.”

Chicago Tribune

“Breath-stopping . . . Another compelling story featuring dedicated lawman Decker and his Orthodox Jewish wife, Rina Lazarus.”

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It’s got everything . . .
and the characterizations are winning.”
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has pulled together elements of suspense,
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wrapped them into a potent plot certain to
captivate genre fans . . . There’s little
doubt her latest Pete Decker/Rina Lazarus
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*Booklist***

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them into a seamless whole, and dropping
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maintaining suspense.
That’s some talent.”
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*Publishers Weekly***

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and Jonestown . . . One of the finest
sisters in crime . . . Kellerman will
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STALKER

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***For those who have made it worthwhile
to get up in the morning.***

To Jesse for the projects and excitement.

To Rachel for the elegance and style.

To Ilana for the fun and games.

To Aliza for the snuggles and the warmth.

***To Anne, my mother,
for the unconditional support.***

***To Barney, the suffering agent,
for the twenty-four-hour ear.***

***And to Jonathan—my partner in crime
as well as love.***



***Special thanks to
Special Agent Gayle Jacobs
for giving me a clue.
Any mistakes are mine, not hers.***

Prologue

Because her recent days had been filled with scientific data and research, Europa had paused only for the most basic of human necessities—food, water, bathroom breaks. Her nights had been equally jammed as she tried desperately to play catch-up—exercising on the stationary cycle, calling friends and attempting a life. Time had taken on a pace as unstoppable as the biblical flood. The rushing tempo had given her sporadic anxiety attacks as well as migratory bouts of heart palpitation—unusual since she was in peak condition and excellent health. She'd probably live a long time, judging by her parents' genetics. Her mother had been in her early sixties when she had died, but she had been a broken woman.

Unlike her father.

Her father. He'd be in his seventies. And like most narcissists, he'd probably be in wonderful health.

Or so she thought.

But no time for any musings. Her professional calendar had been too demanding.

Except there had been that recurring daydream, a fragment from her past, a sneaky little devil that kept insinuating itself into Europa's brain when she least expected it.

A remembrance of things past, thank you, Proust.

Sitting by the lake, watching the water gently lap up

on the shoreline. For her tenth birthday, her father had decided to take her camping—just the two of them, leaving her squalling younger brothers at home with Mom. Dad had taken her somewhere up in the San Bernardino Mountains. To this day, Europa wasn't sure of the precise location, and after she had become estranged from her father, she hadn't bothered to ask.

The moment to remember had been at night. Back then, the stars weren't subjects of scientific scrutiny nor were they inanimate objects of cosmological theory. They were millions of diamonds set into a velvet sky. The moon had been out—a waning moon, Europa recalled that. Its beams had bounced and rolled along the caressing waves. They had just finished a trout dinner cooked on the campfire . . . roasted marshmallows for dessert. Snuggling under her sleeping blanket with her father by her side.

Just the two of them.

When her father had been the most important person in her life.

To help her fall asleep, he had told her stories, something he rarely did. Tales of evil empires in faraway places called black holes. There were also the heroic, fleet-footed knights of Quasar. And when demons of black holes tried to capture the knights of Quasar with their secret destructive weapon called *gravity*, the knights would turn themselves into invisible, weightless rays, and escape faster than the speed of light.

A fantastic story because her science teacher had told them that nothing traveled faster than the speed of light. And when she had mentioned that fact to her father, he had laughed, then kissed her cheek. The only time in her life when Europa remembered being the recipient of her father's affection. Not that Dad had been overtly cruel, just inconsiderate. But mostly absent.

She thought of that night when she received the news—that her father was not only dead, but had died under suspicious circumstances.

1

"The thing is, they moved the body, Lieutenant."

"What?" Decker strained to hear Oliver's voice over the unmarked's radio static. "Who's they?"

"Whoever's acting as the head honcho of the Order, I guess. Marge did manage to seal off the bedroom. That's where Jupiter was found—"

"Could you talk up, Scott?"

"—point being that the crime scene is screwed up, and the body has been messed with because of the shrine."

"Shrine?"

"Yeah. When we got here, the members were in the process of dressing him and constructing this shrine—"

"Where's the body now?"

"In a small anteroom off some kind of church—"

Temple, Decker heard a male voice enunciate from the background. "Someone with you, Detective?"

"Hold on, lemme . . ."

Decker tapped the steering wheel until Scott came back on the line. It took a while.

Oliver held his voice low. "I told them to stop messing with the corpse until you got here. Not being a trusting soul, I've been guarding the body with some self-appointed guru who calls himself Brother Pluto. I sent an officer in there to keep him company so we could talk more privately."

The electronic noise cracked through Decker's ear. He said, "You need to talk louder."

Oliver spoke up. "This Pluto person doesn't want the police here. He keeps insisting that the death was natural, waving this bogus death certificate to prove it, disregarding the empty fifth of Stoli underneath the bed. Which *he* claims wasn't Jupiter's because Jupiter didn't drink."

"*Death* certificate?" Decker said. "Has the coroner been there?"

"Nope. It was signed by a gent named Brother Nova."

"Who's he?"

"Got me, sir."

"Did you explain to them what we're doing is standard procedure in sudden deaths?"

"I've tried to explain it, but Pluto's *not* listening." A laugh. "I've been biting my tongue, refraining from asking him where Goofy was."

Decker smiled. Oliver was showing unusual discretion. "Did you tell him that we have to transport the body to the morgue for autopsy?"

"Been saving the good news for you. Because right now, Pluto and his toons are not happy campers, though I suspect they've never been a cheerful lot. Who called the death in?"

"Jupiter's daughter. Her name is Europa Ganz. She's on the faculty at Southwest University of Technology. Jupiter used to be a hotshot professor there years ago. His real name is Emil Euler Ganz. Apparently, the daughter's not associated with the Order."

"So how'd she find out about the death?"

A good question. "I don't know, Scott. The details are sketchy." He hesitated. "Find out about Ganz's death certificate. This Nova must be a member of the Order, right?"

"I'd assume so. Probably some kind of in-house doctor. But that doesn't qualify him to sign off on Jupiter."

True enough. Decker's finely tuned psycho-BS-detector was on max. He said, "The static is really bad. I'm having

trouble hearing you. Just keep status quo until I get there.”

“We’re trying. But the parishioners are getting feisty. Is ‘parishioners’ the right word?”

It was fine with Decker although cult followers seemed more apropos. “Just try to keep everyone quiet.”

“How far are you from the holy spot?”

“Four, five miles. Traffic’s a little thick. I’ll be there in about fifteen minutes.”

“See you.” Oliver clicked off.

The initial call had come through while Decker was still home, eating breakfast with his younger daughter, who was as skinny as the stick figures she drew. Hannah thought it was great fun to pick the raisins from her oatmeal, leaving behind the grainy mush. Decker was trying to spoon-feed her, attempting to get some nutrition down her gullet until Rina aptly pointed out that the child was five, and capable of feeding herself.

He lived about twenty minutes by freeway from the station house, about thirty-five minutes from the crime scene. That was on good days, and today wasn’t one of them. Decker ran his left hand through strands of ginger hair now streaked with white, and settled into the seat of the unmarked Buick. He guzzled strong coffee from a thermos. Across the passenger’s seat was the front page of the *Los Angeles Times*.

Eight-oh-five and nothing was moving.

Inching his way up to the next off-ramp, he decided to exit and take Devonshire. The boulevard was one of the main east-west arteries through the San Fernando Valley, six lanes lined with strip malls, wholesalers and industrial warehouses. Going farther west, the street’s industry gave way to residences—stucco ranch houses sitting on flat land that once held agricultural orchards—oranges, lemons, apricots. He and Rina had recently purchased a house in the area, intending to move in after a few minor renovations.

Which had turned (predictably) into a major overhaul.

He could have done the job himself *if* he hadn't been gainfully employed. So they bit the bullet, hiring subs while Rina acted as the contractor. One day, Decker had come to the property to find his wife precariously balanced on a ladder, pointing out to the roofer a defect near the chimney. Her skirt blew in the wind as she spoke animatedly, though Decker couldn't hear a word of the conversation. Apparently the roofer had run the hose over the top of the house for twenty minutes, proudly pronouncing the place water-tight. But Rina had been skeptical. She had run the hose for three hours, discovering a leak after two hours and twenty minutes.

(The first rain would have ruined the hardwood floors, Peter.)

Decker smiled, thinking about her image—that of his Orthodox Jewish wife perched on the highest rung of a tall ladder, one hand pointing out flaws while the other held down that hat she wore to cover her hair.

The scene helped to buoy his spirits. The day was gray and dirty, typical overcast May weather in Los Angeles. At least the cars were moving. He proceeded west into open terrain, the foothills on the right greened by the recent rains. They had become rolling waves of wild grass and flowers, spewing their pollens, making it a miserable allergy season. What Decker wouldn't have given to have the Allegra concession this year.

He thought about Europa Ganz's call to headquarters—reported as a suspicious death. In this case meaning suicide as opposed to death by natural causes. How could she know anything if she wasn't there?

Someone tipped her. Who? And why?

Decker found suicides annoying because everything was left pending until the coroner made a definitive ruling. In the meantime, Homicide was saddled with the unpleasant job of keeping everything and everyone on hold, plus preserving the integrity of the "crime" scene—*just in case*. If Ganz had been someone less noteworthy, Decker wouldn't have been called down. But since the corpse had

once been a luminary prizewinner in astrophysics—a visionary for his generation eons ago—as well as the current leader of a two-hundred-plus-person enclave, Strapp thought it a good idea for someone with a title to make an appearance. The captain would have come in person, except he'd had a morning meeting downtown.

From what Scott Oliver had said over the radio, the members of the Order of the Rings of God were griping about the police. Of course, they'd gripe about anything establishment. Decker had been inside the compound once. It was not the stark and sterile place he had imagined. The interior had high ceilings with lots of skylights—blueness and sunshine visible from all angles. A complete view of the heavens, as if Ganz hadn't quite given up cosmology.

Lots of skylights, several gable vents, but very few windows.

Decker had been called out to investigate a kidnapping charge, which turned out to be another case of a wayward kid exchanging the complexities of freedom for straightforward rules and regulations. He hadn't talked to Ganz. Instead, he had been given some underling with a celestial name. (Had it been Pluto?) The sect member had insisted that no one was ever held against his or her will.

He seemed to speak the truth. He had allowed Decker inside the entry hall to interview the kid. Clearly, the boy had wanted to be there. Although Decker's heart went out to the parents, he was hog-tied. Their son was over eighteen and legally—if not emotionally—an adult.

Looking into his rearview mirror, Decker saw the meat wagon about thirty feet behind him. He led the way to the compound. Together, they pulled up curbside, parked and got out.

The Order of the Rings of God had placed itself on five acres of flat land blending into mountainside. The structure was a series of square, gray stucco bunkers linked together chock-a-block. From this view, Decker could see the tops of the skylights peeking out from the roofs. And