

New York Times Bestselling Author of
WHAT THE DEAD KNOW

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ANOTHER THING TO FALL

A NOVEL

Another Thing to Fall

Laura Lippman

 HarperCollins e-books

Dedication

In memory of Robert F. Colesberry

Epigraph

'Tis one thing to be tempted, Escalus, Another thing to fall.

—*Measure for Measure*

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Dedication

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Author's Note

Excerpt from *Hush Hush*

Monday

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MARCH

There she was.

Smaller than he expected. Younger, too. But the primary shock was that she was human, a person just like him. Well, not *just* like him—there was the thirty-plus age difference to start—but flesh and blood, standing on a street in Baltimore, occupying the same latitude and longitude, breathing the same air. Look at her, sipping one of those enormous coffee drinks that all the young people seemed to carry now, as if the entire generation had been weaned too early and never recovered from the shock of it. He imagined a world of twenty-somethings, their mouths puckering around nothingness, looking without something to suck. Figuratively, not literally. Unlike most people, even allegedly educated ones, he used those words with absolute precision and prided himself on the fact, as he prided himself on all his usage, even in the sentences he formed in his head, the endless sentences, the commentaries that never stopped, the running voice-over of his life. Which was funny, as he disdained voice-over in film, where it almost never worked.

Yet even as the vision of a suckling nation took shape in his head, he knew it wasn't his exclusively that it had been influenced by something he had seen. Who? What? A small part of his brain wouldn't rest until he pinned down this fleeting memory. He was as punctilious about the origins of his ideas as he was about the correctness of his speech.

He liked young people, usually, thrived in their company, and they seemed to like him, too. *Crabbed age and youth cannot live together*—whoever wrote that line couldn't have been more wrong. The young people he invited into his home, his life, had given him sustenance, enough so that he didn't mind tolerating the inevitable rumors. *Baltimore bachelor...lives by himself in that old house near the park...up to strange things with all that camera equipment. People swear he's on the up-and-up, but who can tell?* But those things were said by the neighbors who didn't know him. When he selected the children, he got to know their parents first, went around to the houses, showed them what he did, explained his methods, provided personal references. It got so where parents were calling him begging for a slot for little Johnny or Jill. Gently, tactfully, he would explain that his wasn't just another after-school program, open to any child. It was up to him, and him alone, who would be admitted.

Now that he had this one in his viewfinder—would he have chosen her, glimpsed her potential when she was eight or nine? Possibly, maybe. It was hard to know. Faces coarsened so much after adolescence. Personalities, more so. This one—she was probably sweet, once upon a time. Affection starved, the kind who crawled into your lap and cupped your cheeks with her baby-fat palms. Patted your face and stroked your hair and stared straight into your eyes with no sense of boundaries, much less the concept of personal space. He loved children when they were unself-conscious, but that phase was so swift, so fleeting, and he was left with the paradox of trying to teach them to be as they once were, to return to a time when they didn't understand the concept of embarrassment, much less worry about what others thought. But it was the eternal struggle—once you realize you're in Eden, you have to leave. He watched the teenage years approach with more anguish than any parent, knowing it marked the end.

The lens was a powerful one, purchased years ago. He was no Luddite—there was much new technology on which he doted, and even more for which he yearned—but he could not sacrifice his old Pentax for a digital camera. Besides, the kind of SLR system he would need was out of reach. The

Canon he had priced online was \$2,500 at discount, and that was for the body alone. No, he would stick with his battered Pentax for now. Come to think of it—how old was this camera? It must be twenty-five, thirty years ago that he had taken the plunge at Cooper's Camera Mart. A memory tickle his nose—what was that wonderful aroma that camera stores once had? Film, it must have been film or the developing products, all outmoded now. Consider it—in his lifetime, just a little over a half century, he had gone from shooting photos with a Kodak automatic, the kind with a detachable wand of flashbulbs, to shooting movies that he could watch instantly at home, and if anyone thought that was inferior to trying to load an eel-slippery roll of film onto a reel, then they had his sympathy. Now he had no complaints about what technology had wrought. Technology was wonderful. If he had had more technology at his disposal, even fifteen years ago, then things might be very different now.

Look up, look up, look up, he urged the image he had captured, and just like that, as if his wish were her command, she lifted her eyes from the paper in front of her, stopped sipping her drink, and stared into the distance. Such an open, innocent face, so guileless and genuine. So everything she wasn't.

Her mouth, free from the straw, puckered in lonely dismay, and he knew in that instant the image that had been tantalizing him—*The Simpsons*, the episode that had managed to parody *The Great Escape* and *The Birds* with just a few deft strokes. He had watched it with his young friends, pointing out the Hitchcock cameo, then screening the real movies for them so they could understand the larger context. (It was the only reason he agreed to watch the cartoon with them, in order to explain all its cinematic allusions.) They had loved both movies, although the explicit horror of killer birds had seemed to affect them far more than the true story behind the men who had escaped from Stalag Luft III, only to be executed upon their capture. He was ten years old when the movie came out—he saw it at the Hippodrome—and World War II, an experience shared by his father and uncles, loomed large in his imagination. Now he found himself surrounded by young people who thought Vietnam was ancient history. They had reeled when they learned he was old enough to have been in the draft. This one—she, too, considered him old, and therefore a person she was free to ignore. She probably didn't even remember the Persian Gulf War. She might not know there was a war going on even now, given how insular she was. Insular and insolent.

He watched the rosebud of her mouth return to the straw and decided that the image that had been teasing him, literally and figuratively, was Lolita. The movie version, of course. No heart-shaped sunglasses, but she didn't need them, did she? *You'll be the death of me*, he lamented, clicking the shutter. *You'll be the death of me.*

Literally and figuratively.

**KISS KISS
BANG BANG**

Fall came early to Mount Vernon this October—much to the neighborhood’s disgust. According to Mandy Stewart, vice president of the Mount Vernon Neighborhood Association, workers for Mann of Steel stripped leaves from the trees in order to create the late-autumn atmosphere required for the miniseries, which is being produced by Philip “Flip” Tumulty Jr.

“They just came through in late September and ripped the leaves from the trees, then put up a few fake brown ones in their place,” Stewart told the Beacon-Light. “They stole our fall out from under us! And they’ve made parking a nightmare.”

Steelworkers are equally peeved with Mann of Steel, which they say has shown a marked indifference to portraying the industry with accuracy. “These guys couldn’t find Sparrows Point on a map,” said Peter Bellamy of Local 9477. “They’re just using us for cheap laughs.”

He said retired steelworkers are considering informational pickets at the series’ various locations around the city, but he disavowed any connection to the series of mishaps that have befallen the production, as detailed previously by the Beacon-Light.

The Maryland Film Commission and the city’s film liaison both said they had received no complaints, insisting the production had been an exemplary, polite presence in the city. Tumulty, through his assistant, refused repeated requests for comment.

Tumulty is the son of the Baltimore filmmaker Philip Tumulty Sr., who first attracted attention with lovingly detailed movies about Baltimore’s Highlandtown neighborhood in the 1960s and early 1970s, such as Pit Beef and The Last Pagoda. But he turned his attention to more conventional—and far more lucrative—Hollywood blockbusters, including The Beast, Piano Man, and Gunsmoke, the last a reworking of the long-running television show. The younger Tumulty, after a much-heralded independent film, written with childhood friend Ben Marcus, has worked exclusively in television.

His latest project, Mann of Steel, has extended the city’s long run with Hollywood, which has been an almost constant presence in Baltimore over the last fifteen years. However, although this series centers on Bethlehem Steel and nineteenth-century Baltimore belle Betsy Patterson, Maryland almost lost the production to Philadelphia, which has more architecture dating from the early 1800s. Special tax incentives helped to lure the show to Maryland.

Unlike previous productions, Mann of Steel has had a rocky relationship with the city from the start. Complaints from neighbors and steelworkers are only part of the problems they have faced. There have been a series of small fires set near some of the locations and rumors of bad behavior by up-and-coming actress Selene Waites, 20, who keeps popping up in local bars.

“We are grateful to Baltimore and Maryland for all they’ve done to make this film possible,” said co-executive producer Charlotte MacKenzie when asked for comment. “We just wish others were grateful for the \$25 million we’re spending, half of which will go directly into the local economy.”

Community activist Stewart is not about to be mollified: “The economic benefits of film production are wildly exaggerated, based on the stars’ salaries, which may or may not be taxed by local authorities,” she said. “The bottom line is that Mann of Steel is a pain in the butt.”

—THE BEACON-LIGHT
OCT.

MONDAY

Chapter 1

The headphones were a mistake. She realized this only in hindsight, but then—what other vision available to a person heading backward into the world?

True, they were good old-fashioned headphones, which didn't seal tightly to the ear, not *earbuds* which she loathed on principle, the principle being that she was thirty-four going on seventy. Furthermore, she had dialed down the volume on her Sony Walkman—yes, a Sony Walkman, sturdy and battered and taxicab yellow, not a sleek little iPod in a more modern or electric shade. Still, for all her precautions, she could hear very little. And even Tess Monaghan would admit that it's important to be attuned to the world when one is charging into it backward, gliding along the middle branch of the Patapsco in a scull and passing through channels that are seldom without traffic, even in the predawn hours.

But Tess had painstakingly rationalized her way into trouble, which, she decided later, is pretty much how everyone gets into trouble, one small rationalization at a time. She wanted to row, yet she felt obligated to listen to her boyfriend on a local radio show, promoting the Oktoberfest lineup at his father's bar. Besides, he planned to play some songs by Brave Combo, a nuclear polka band that Tess quite liked. She would row a path that was familiar to her, and trust the coxswains for the fours and eights to watch her back, a courtesy offered to all scullers.

It did not occur to Tess to row a little later, or skip the workout altogether. The rowing season traditionally ended after Thanksgiving, a mere month away. She had to take advantage of every waning day, especially now that Baltimore was in its full autumnal glory. If aliens had landed in Baltimore on this particular October morning, they would have concluded that it was the most perfect city on the globe they were about to conquer, truly the Charm City it claimed to be. The trees were tinged with gold and scarlet, the breeze was light, the sky was slowly deepening into the kind of brilliant blue that reminded Tess that she once knew the word *cerulean*, if only because it had been on the vocabulary lists for the SATs.

She set out for Fort McHenry, at the distant tip of Locust Point, rationalizing every stroke of the way: She knew the route so well, it was so early, the sun not even up. She had beaten the other rowers to the water, arriving in darkness and pushing off from the dock at first light. She wouldn't wear the headphones on the way back. She just needed to hear Crow on WTMD, listen to him play a few snippets of Brave Combo, then she would turn off the Walkman and—

That's when the police boat, bullhorn blaring, crossed into her line of vision and came charging toward her. By the time she registered everything that was happening—the approaching boat, the screams and shouts coming from all directions, the fact that someone was very keen that she stop and change course—the motorboat had stopped, setting up an enormous, choppy wake that was going to hit her sideways. Tess, trying frantically to slow and steady her scull, had a bona fide moment of prescience. Granted, her vision extended only two or three seconds into the future, but it was uncannily exact: She was going to go ass over teakettle into the Patapsco, a body of water that even conquering aliens from a water-deprived planet would find less than desirable. She closed her eyes and shut her mouth as tightly as possible, grateful she had no cuts or scratches into which microbes could swim.

At least the water held some leftover summer warmth. She broke the surface quickly, orienting herself by locating the star-shaped fort just to the north, then the wide channel into the bay to the east.

of the fort, toward which her vessel was now drifting. “Get my shell,” she spluttered to the police boat whose occupants stared back at her, blank faced. “My shell! My scull! MY GODDAMN BOAT!” Comprehension dawning, the cops reached out and steadied her orphaned scull alongside the starboard side of their boat. Tess began to swim toward them, but a second motorboat cut her off.

A man sat in the stern of this one, his face obscured by a baseball cap, his arms crossed over a fleece vest emblazoned with a curious logo, *MANN OF STEEL*. He continued to hug his arms close to his chest, a modern-day Washington crossing the Delaware, even as two young people put down their clipboards and reached out to Tess, boosting her into the boat.

“Congratulations,” said the male of the pair. “You just ruined a shot that we’ve been trying to get for three days.”

Tess glanced around, taking in everything her back had failed to see. This usually quiet strip around Fort McHenry was ringed with boats. There was an outer periphery of police launches, set up to protect an inner circle, which included this boat and another nearby, with what appeared to be a mounted camera and another fleece-jacketed man. There were people onshore, too, and some part of Tess’s mind registered that this was odd, given that Fort McHenry didn’t open its gates to the public until 9 A.M. Farther up the fort’s grassy slopes, she could see large white trailers and vans, some with blue writing that she could just make out: *HADDAD’S RENTALS*. She squeezed her ponytail and tried to wring some water from her T-shirt, but the standing man frowned, as if it were bad form to introduce water into a boat.

“The sun’s up now,” said the young woman who had helped Tess into the boat, her tone dire, as if this daily fact of life, the sun rising, was the most horrible thing imaginable. “We lost all the roses you wanted.”

The doubly stern man threw his Natty Boh cap down in the boat, revealing a headful of brown curls at which he literally tore. He was younger than Tess had realized, not much older than she, no more than thirty-five. “Three days,” he said. “Three days of trying to get this shot and some *stupid* rowing has to come along at the exact wrong moment—”

“Tess Monaghan,” she said, offering a damp, sticky hand. He didn’t take it. “And I’m sorry about the accident, but *you* almost killed *me*.”

“No offense,” said Natty Boh, “but that might have been cheaper for us in the long run.”

Chapter 2

“Are you sure you want to wait for your clothes to go through the wash?” asked the girl from the boat, the brunette with the clipboard. “We could dress you from the underwear up with things in the wardrobe trailer. What are you? Size twelve? Fourteen?”

Tess was seldom nonplussed, but she found this offer—and eerily on-target assessment of her size, which was usually a twelve, but had been known to flirt with fourteen after a Goldenberg Peanut Chute fling—disorienting to say the least. *Surreal* was an overused word in Tess’s experience, but it suited the events of the morning so far. Now that she was on land, her Hollywood rescuers were behaving more like captors, making sure she was never out of their sight. Were they worried about a lawsuit? She covered her confusion by bending down and toweling her hair, checking to see if it still carried the whiff of river water beneath the green apple scent of the shampoo. They had been kind enough to let her shower in one of the trailers, which they kept calling bangers, much to Tess’s confusion. Was that jargon some sort of sexual allusion? There also had been mention of a honey wagon and repeated offers to bring her something from craft services, but she wasn’t sure what that meant. Macramé?

“No, I’ll wait, if you don’t mind,” she said. “My Under Armour tights and jog bra will dry really fast, even on a low-heat cycle, and I don’t mind if the T-shirt is a little damp.”

“Everything we have is *clean*,” the young woman said, her tone huffy, as if she were personally offended by Tess’s refusal of laundered-but-possibly-used underwear. “And we’d put you in modern clothes, from the present-day sequences, not the nineteenth-century stuff.” Again, that cool appraising look, unnerving in an otherwise sweet-faced young woman, not even twenty-five by Tess’s estimation. “You probably wouldn’t fit into those, anyway. They’re quite small.”

Tess cinched the belt of the bathrobe they had loaned her. The garment was Pepto-Bismol pink and made of a fluffy chenillelike material that seemed to expand the longer she wore it, so she felt quite lost and shapeless within it. Still, she did have a waist and a respectably solid body somewhere inside this pink mass.

The man in the Natty Boh cap, who had been on his cell phone almost constantly since they arrived at the trailer—*banger*—suddenly barked: “Arrange for her clothes to go to the nearest coin laundry, Greer.” Then, to Tess, picking up a conversation that he had started perhaps twenty minutes earlier during one of the lulls between phone calls: “You see the irony, right? During the Civil War, Francis Scott Key’s descendant was held as a prisoner here, in the very fort where Key was kept when he wrote ‘The Star-Spangled Banner.’”

“Well, Key was on a British ship, stationed in the harbor. But I guess I—”

“Key was on a ship?” He looked dubious. “Greer, check that out, will you? I think we have a reference to it in one-oh-three. We may have to save that with looping.”

His girl Friday dutifully jotted some notes on her clipboard. “Should I use the Internet or—”

“Just check it out. And do something about her clothes, okay?” Greer scurried away, even as Tess marveled at the man’s ability to switch from bossy-brittle to seductive-suppliant and back again without missing a beat. She wondered if he ever got confused, used the imperious tone on those he was trying to impress, then spoke beguilingly to those he meant to dominate. “On the boat or on the shore, it’s the larger irony that concerns me. ‘Everything connects,’ like it says in *Howards End*.”

Tess didn’t have the heart to tell him that the epigraph for E. M. Forster’s novel was *only* connected. Everyone made mistakes. She just wished the man would stop trying so hard to impress her and

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