



The Silent Girl (with bonus short story Freaks): A Rizzoli & Isles Novel

By Tess Gerritsen

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In the murky shadows of Boston's Chinatown lies a severed hand. On the tenement rooftop above is the corpse belonging to that hand, a red-haired woman dressed in black, her head nearly decapitated. Two strands of silver hair—not human—cling to her body. They are homicide cop Jane Rizzoli's only clues, but they're enough for her and medical examiner Maura Isles to make the startling discovery: that this violent death had a chilling prequel. Nineteen years earlier, a horrifying murder-suicide in a Chinatown restaurant left five people dead. One woman connected to that massacre is still alive—a mysterious martial arts master who is now the target of someone, or something, deeply and relentlessly evil. Cracking a crime with bone-chilling echoes of an ancient Chinese legend, Rizzoli and Isles must outwit an unseen enemy with centuries of cunning—and a swift, avenging blade.

Don't miss Tess Gerritsen's short story "Freaks" in the back of the book.

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Editorial Review

Review

“Suspense doesn't get smarter than this. Not just recommended but mandatory.”—Lee Child

“Another great thrill ride . . . *The Silent Girl* is one of [Tess] Gerritsen's best.”—Associated Press

“Gripping . . . Both women deal with personal and family issues that reveal their humanity and lend credibility to this deft thriller.”—*Publishers Weekly*

“Chilling and thrilling . . . an exciting and suspense-filled adventure.”—Wichita Falls *Times Record News*

About the Author

New York Times bestselling author **Tess Gerritsen** earned international acclaim for her first novel of suspense, *Harvest*. She introduced detective Jane Rizzoli in *The Surgeon* (2001) and Dr. Maura Isles in *The Apprentice* (2002) and has gone on to write numerous other titles in the celebrated Rizzoli & Isles series, including *The Mephisto Club*, *The Keepsake*, *Ice Cold*, *The Silent Girl*, *Last to Die*, and *Die Again*. Her latest novel is the standalone thriller *Playing with Fire*. A physician, Tess Gerritsen lives in Maine.

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ONE

San Francisco

ALL DAY, I HAVE BEEN WATCHING THE GIRL.

She gives no indication that she's aware of me, although my rental car is within view of the street corner where she and the other teenagers have gathered this afternoon, doing whatever bored kids do to pass the time. She looks younger than the others, but perhaps it's because she's Asian and petite at seventeen, just a wisp of a girl. Her black hair is cropped as short as a boy's, and her blue jeans are ragged and torn. Not a fashion statement, I think, but a result of hard use and life on the streets. She puffs on a cigarette and exhales a cloud of smoke with the nonchalance of a street thug, an attitude that doesn't match her pale face and delicate Chinese features. She is pretty enough to attract the hungry stares of two men who pass by. The girl notices their looks and glares straight back at them, unafraid, but it's easy to be fearless when danger is merely an abstract concept. Faced with a real threat, how would this girl react, I wonder. Would she put up a fight or would she crumble? I want to know what she's made of, but I have not seen her put to the test.

As evening falls, the teenagers on the corner begin to disband. First one and then another wanders away. In San Francisco, even summer nights are chilly, and those who remain huddle together in their sweaters and jackets, lighting one another's cigarettes, savoring the ephemeral heat of the flame. But cold and hunger eventually disperse the last of them, leaving only the girl, who has nowhere to go. She waves to her departing friends and for a while lingers alone, as though waiting for someone. At last, with a shrug, she leaves the corner and walks in my direction, her hands thrust in her pockets. As she passes my car, she doesn't even glance at me, but looks straight ahead, her gaze focused and fierce, as if she's mentally churning

over some dilemma. Perhaps she's thinking about where she's going to scavenge dinner tonight. Or perhaps it's something more consequential. Her future. Her survival.

She's probably unaware that two men are following her.

Seconds after she walks past my car, I spot the men emerging from an alley. I recognize them; it's the same pair who had stared at her earlier. As they move past my car, trailing her, one of the men looks at me through the windshield. It's just a quick glance to assess whether I am a threat. What he sees does not concern him in the least, and he and his companion keep walking. They move like the confident predators they are, stalking weaker prey who cannot possibly fight them off.

I step out of my car and follow them. Just as they are following the girl.

She heads into a neighborhood where too many buildings stand abandoned, where the sidewalk seems paved with broken bottles. The girl betrays no fear, no hesitation, as if this is familiar territory. Not once does she glance back, which tells me she is either foolhardy or clueless about the world and what it can do to girls like her. The men following her don't glance back, either. Even if they were to spot me, which I do not allow to happen, they would see nothing to be afraid of. No one ever does.

A block ahead, the girl turns right, vanishing through a doorway.

I retreat into the shadows and watch what happens next. The two men pause outside the building that the girl has entered, conferring over strategy. Then they, too, step inside.

From the sidewalk, I look up at the boarded-over windows. It is a vacant warehouse posted with a NO TRESPASSING notice. The door hangs ajar. I slip inside, into gloom so thick that I pause to let my eyes adjust as I rely on my other senses to take in what I cannot yet see. I hear the floor creaking. I smell burning candle wax. I see the faint glow of the doorway to my left. Pausing outside it, I peer into the room beyond.

The girl kneels before a makeshift table, her face lit by one flickering candle. Around her are signs of temporary habitation: a sleeping bag, tins of food, and a small camp stove. She is struggling with a balky can opener and is unaware of the two men closing in from behind.

Just as I draw in a breath to shout a warning, the girl whirls around to face the trespassers. All she has in her hand is the can opener, a meager weapon against two larger men.

"This is my home," she says. "Get out."

I had been prepared to intervene. Instead I pause where I am to watch what happens next. To see what the girl is made of.

One of the men laughs. "We're just visiting, honey."

"Did I invite you?"

"You look like you could use the company."

"You look like you could use a brain."

Not a wise way to handle the situation, I think. Now their lust is mingled with anger, a dangerous combination. Yet the girl stands perfectly still, perfectly calm, brandishing that pitiful kitchen utensil. As the men lunge, I am already on the balls of my feet, ready to spring.

She springs first. One leap and her foot thuds straight into the first man's sternum. It's an inelegant but effective blow and he staggers, gripping his chest as if he cannot breathe. Before the second man can react, she is already spinning toward him, and she slams the can opener against the side of his head. He howls and backs away.

This has gotten interesting.

The first man has recovered and rushes at her, slamming her so hard that they both go sprawling onto the floor. She kicks and punches, and her fist cracks into his jaw. But fury has inured him to pain and with a roar he rolls on top of her, immobilizing her with his weight.

Now the second man jumps back in. Grabbing her wrists, he pins them against the floor. Youth and inexperience have landed her in a calamity that she cannot possibly escape. As fierce as she is, the girl is green and untrained, and the inevitable is about to happen. The first man has unzipped her jeans and he yanks them down past her skinny hips. His arousal is evident, his trousers bulging. Never is a man more vulnerable to attack.

He doesn't hear me coming. One moment he's unzipping his fly. The next, he's on the floor, his jaw shattered, loose teeth spilling from his mouth.

The second man barely has time to release the girl's hands and jump up, but he's not quick enough. I am a tiger and he is nothing more than a lumbering buffalo, stupid and helpless against my strike. With a shriek he drops to the ground, and judging by the grotesque angle of his arm, his bone has been snapped in two.

I grab the girl and yank her to her feet. "Are you unhurt?"

She zips up her jeans and stares at me. "Who the hell are you?"

"That's for later. Now we go!" I bark.

"How did you do that? How did you bring them down so fast?"

"Do you want to learn?"

"Yes!"

I look at the two men groaning and writhing at our feet. "Then here is the first lesson: Know when to run." I shove her toward the door. "That time would be now."

I WATCH HER EAT. For a small girl, she has the appetite of a wolf, and she devours three chicken tacos, a lake of refried beans, and a large glass of Coca-Cola. Mexican food was what she wanted, so we sit in a café where mariachi music plays and the walls are adorned with gaudy paintings of dancing señoritas. Though the girl's features are Chinese, she is clearly American, from her cropped hair to her tattered jeans. A crude and feral creature who slurps up the last of her Coke before noisily gnawing on the ice cubes.

I begin to doubt the wisdom of this venture. She is already too old to be taught, too wild to learn discipline. I should release her back to the streets, if that's where she wants to go, and find another way. But then I notice the scars on her knuckles and remember how close she came to single-handedly taking down the two men. She has raw talent and is fearless-two things that cannot be taught.

"Do you remember me?" I ask.

The girl sets down her glass and frowns. For an instant I think I see a flash of recognition, but then it's gone. She shakes her head.

"It was a long time ago," I say. "Twelve years." An eternity for a girl so young. "You were small."

She shrugs. "No wonder I don't remember you." She reaches in her jacket, pulls out a cigarette, and starts to light it.

"You're polluting your body."

"It's my body," she retorts.

"Not if you wish to train." I reach across the table and snatch the cigarette from her lips. "If you want to learn, your attitude must change. You must show respect."

She snorts. "You sound like my mother."

"I knew your mother. In Boston."

"Well, she's dead."

"I know. She wrote me last month. She told me she was ill and had very little time left. That's why I'm here."

I'm surprised to see tears glisten in the girl's eyes and she quickly turns away, as though ashamed to reveal weakness. But in that vulnerable instant, before she hides her eyes, she brings to mind my own daughter, who was younger than this girl when I lost her. My eyes sting with tears, but I don't try to hide them. Sorrow has made me who I am. It has been the refining fire that has honed my resolve and sharpened my purpose.

I need this girl. Clearly, she also needs me.

"It's taken me weeks to find you," I tell her.

"Foster home sucked. I'm better off on my own."

"If your mother saw you now, her heart would break."

"She never had time for me."

"Maybe because she was working two jobs, trying to keep you fed? Because she couldn't count on anyone but herself to do it?"

"She let the world walk all over her. Not once did I see her stand up for anything. Not even me."

"She was afraid."

"She was spineless."

I lean forward, enraged by this ungrateful brat. "Your poor mother suffered in ways you can't possibly imagine. Everything she did was for you." In disgust, I toss her cigarette back at her. This is not the girl I'd hoped to find. She may be strong and fearless, but no sense of filial duty binds her to her dead mother and father, no sense of family honor. Without ties to our ancestors, we are lonely specks of dust, adrift and floating, attached to nothing and no one.

I pay the bill for her meal and stand. "Someday, I hope you find the wisdom to understand what your mother sacrificed for you."

"You're leaving?"

"There's nothing I can teach you."

"Why would you want to, anyway? Why did you even come looking for me?"

"I thought I would find someone different. Someone I could teach. Someone who would help me."

"To do what?"

I don't know how to answer her question. For a moment, the only sound is the tinny mariachi music spilling from the restaurant speakers.

"Do you remember your father?" I ask. "Do you remember what happened to him?"

She stares at me. "That's what this is about, isn't it? That's why you came looking for me. Because my mother wrote you about him."

"Your father was a good man. He loved you, and you dishonor him. You dishonor both your parents." I place a bundle of cash in front of her. "This is in their memory. Get off the street and go back to school. At least there, you won't have to fight off strange men." I turn and walk out of the restaurant.

In seconds she's out the door and running after me. "Wait!" she calls. "Where are you going?"

"Back home to Boston."

"I do remember you. I think I know what you want."

I stop and face her. "It's what you should want, too."

"What do I have to do?"

I look her up and down, and see scrawny shoulders and hips so narrow they barely hold up her blue jeans. "It's not what you need to do," I reply. "It's what you need to be." Slowly I move toward her. Up till this point, she's seen no reason to fear me and why should she? I am just a woman. But something she now sees in my eyes makes her take a step back.

"Are you afraid?" I ask her softly.

Her chin juts up, and she says with foolish bravado: "No. I'm not."

"You should be."

TWO

Seven years later

M

Y NAME IS DR. MAURA ISLES, LAST NAME SPELLED I-S-L-E-S. I'M A forensic pathologist, employed by the medical examiner's office in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts."

"Please describe for the court your education and background, Dr. Isles," said the Suffolk County assistant district attorney Carmela Aguilar.

Maura kept her gaze on the assistant DA as she answered the question. It was far easier to focus on Aguilar's neutral face than to see the glares coming from the defendant and his supporters, dozens of whom had gathered in the courtroom. Aguilar did not seem to notice or care that she was arguing her case before a hostile audience, but Maura was acutely aware of it; a large segment of that audience was law enforcement officers and their friends. They were not going to like what Maura had to say.

The defendant was Boston PD officer Wayne Brian Graff, square-jawed and broad-shouldered, the vision of an all-American hero. The room's sympathy was with Graff, not with the victim, a man who had ended up battered and broken on Maura's autopsy table six months ago. A man who'd been buried unmourned and unclaimed. A man who, two hours before his death, committed the fatal sin of shooting and killing a police officer.

Maura felt all those courtroom gazes burning into her face, hot as laser points, as she recited her curriculum vitae.

"I graduated from Stanford University with a BA in anthropology," she said. "I received my medical degree from the University of California in San Francisco, and went on to complete a five-year pathology residency at that same institution. I am certified in both anatomical and clinical pathology. After my residency, I then completed a two- year fellowship in the subspecialty of forensic pathology, at the University of California-Los Angeles."

"And are you board-certified in your field?"

"Yes, ma'am. In both general and forensic pathology."

"And where have you worked prior to joining the ME's office here in Boston?"

From the Hardcover edition.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Ryan Daggett:

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