

Devoted in Death

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In this crime thriller in the #1 New York Times bestselling series, Lieutenant Eve Dallas tracks a pair of Bonnie and Clyde copycats whose heated passion for each other is fueled by cold brutality.

When Eve Dallas examines a fresh body in a seedy alleyway in downtown Manhattan, the victim's injuries are so extensive that she almost misses the clue. Carved into the skin is the shape of a heart-initials inside reading "E" and "D"...

In Arkansas, Ella-Loo and her recently released ex-con boyfriend, Darryl, don't ever intend to part again. So they hit the road, but then things get a little messy and they wind up killing someone-an experience that stokes a fierce, wild desire in Ella-Loo. A desire for Darryl. And a desire to kill again.

As they cross state lines on their way to New York to find the life they think they deserve, they leave a trail of evil behind them. But now they've landed in the jurisdiction of Lt. Dallas and her team at the New York Police and Security Department. And, with her husband Roarke at her side, Eve has every intention of hunting them down and giving them what they truly deserve...

J. D. Robb is the pseudonym for a #1 New York Times bestselling author of more than 200 novels, including the bestselling In Death series. There are more than 500 million copies of her books in print. Chapter One

The first kill was an accident. Mostly.

All they wanted was a nice car-it didn't even have to be fancy-because their piece of shit truck shuddered, wheezed, then let out a death rattle just after they'd crossed over into Arkansas from Oklahoma.

It was Ella-Loo's idea how to go about acquiring a new ride. She'd always had ideas, and dreams along with them, and since meeting Darryl she'd come to believe those dreams would come true.

She'd been working in a cowboy bar in Dry Creek, a place many who lived there considered the armpit of Oklahoma as it sat on a curve of a desolate spit of land where the Panhandle cornered into Texas. None of her dreams had come true; and, in fact, the man she'd been with-that son of a whore Cody Bates-had given her a black eye and split her lip open before he'd left her flat on the ground in front of the very bar she now worked.

She knew she was made for better things than serving up beer and rotgut whiskey to cowboys and the hard-eyed women who dogged them. She was made for better than pulling in extra giving blow jobs or quick bangs in the bathroom stall or the cab of a pickup to men with beer breath and no ambitions beyond the next ride.

The better walked into Rope 'N Ride one fateful night in the person of Darryl Roy James. She knew, the minute she laid eyes on him.

He was the one. What had been missing. What she needed to complete all she was and could be.

Later she would tell him how when he came through the fake saloon doors, light-red-gold as a sunset-had glowed around him. His bright hair had shimmered with it, and his eyes-blue and clear as lake water on a postcard-had glowed.

And she knew all she needed to know.

He wasn't like the others, nothing like the barn-smelling, ass-grabbing sort that frequented the Rope 'N Ride.

He had something.

After a brief, intense mating dance, after he'd all but nailed her to the stall door in the bathroom, then again against the wall outside the break door, he'd told her the same.

One look, he'd said. Like, no sooner looked than loved. That was from a book. From Shakespeare. Darryl had read some Shakespeare-Slick Willy, he called him-while getting his high school diploma courtesy of juvenile detention in Denton County, Texas, where he'd run off to find his fortune at sixteen.

He'd walked out of juvie at eighteen, into a job at his mother's boyfriend's garage. Darryl had a way with engines as some had a way with horses. Barlow, who nagged Darryl to distraction, said if he spent as much effort on the job as he did dreaming about being somewhere else, he'd be a rich man.

But Darryl had never seen the point in working himself to death when there were so many other ways to get what he wanted. And taking it from somebody else was the best way he knew.

Still, since he didn't want to go back to jail, he stuck it out for the lifetime of nearly three years.

Then he'd gotten what he wanted by stealing the \$6,800 under-the-table cash Barlow kept hidden under the false bottom of a drawer in his office.

Which showed what a dumbass Barlow was.

Then he'd helped himself to some equipment, some parts, busted open the display case on Barlow's prized bowie knife-figuring he could sell it along the way.

He'd packed up while his mother was at work waiting tables as she always had for piss-poor pay and worse tips. He pocketed \$3,200 from the pouch she kept in her flour tin-it rounded him up to \$10,000.

As he considered himself a good son, he'd left her the remaining \$646 with a note that read:

Thanks, Ma. Love, Darryl

He'd loaded up the truck he boosted from the garage, and said adi-fucking-os to Lonesome, Oklahoma.

He walked into the Rope 'N Ride, and Ella-Loo's life on his twenty-first birthday.

That was fate, they determined, as they were a gift to each other.

Within twenty-four hours she and the duffel bag holding all her worldly possessions were loaded in the truck with him.

They drove fast, spent lavishly, stole when the mood struck, and fucked like a pair of rabid minx at every opportunity.

By the time Darryl was arrested in Tulsa for trying to pocket an engagement ring for his soul mate, they'd blown through nearly every dollar they had between them.

He got four years-as he'd had the bowie knife on him-and this time in the Oklahoma State Pen.

Ella-Loo waited for him. She took a job at another bar, made extra with bjs-though she wouldn't, even for good money-allow any other penetration.

She was a one-man woman.

As devoted as a priest at Sunday Mass, she visited Darryl every week, and, in fact,

conceived a child on a conjugal visit.

Darryl read more Shakespeare and honed his mechanical skills. He learned more about engines, learned how to build bombs, learned more complex ins and outs of computers and electronics.

He got himself an education he might've put to good use on the outside.

She named the baby Darra, after her Darryl, and drove her back to Elk City where Ella-Loo presented the infant to Darra's grandma.

Though she could hardly stand to be away from Darryl so long, she gave it ten days. Long enough for her mother to fall in love with the baby, and for her stepfather to relax his guard.

Knowing her mother would never allow her stepfather to set the cops on her, she took her great-grandmother's silver-it would've come to her one day anyway-left the baby, and drove back to McAlester for the next visiting day.

Maybe, when they were ready to settle down, she and Darryl would go back for their daughter. But like Darryl said, they were star-crossed lovers, and had to live and love every minute to the full.

A baby didn't fit in with that.

He got out in three and a half years, due to good behavior, and she was waiting for him wearing a tight white dress and red high heels.

They barely made it to the by-the-month room before the dress was on the floor and the shoes were in the air.

As they both agreed they wanted McAlester in the truck's rearview, they spent only that night eating, drinking-the sparkling wine Ella-Loo had copped from the bar where she would no longer work or give bjs-and having sex.

She wanted to go east, clear to the Atlantic Ocean. She wanted big city lights and noise and everything that wasn't Oklahoma.

New York City, she told Darryl, was their destiny, as it was the only town big and bright enough to hold them.

So when Darryl's truck coughed and wheezed, he used his skill-and parts he stripped off another he found in a parking lot-got it running pretty smooth again. He headed east with the radio blaring and Ella-Loo curled against his side like an appendage.

Even with his skill, the old truck couldn't handle the miles or the speed, and died like a dog. And Ella-Loo had her idea.

Darryl managed to baby and jury-rig the truck enough to limp it off the main road while she consulted the in-dash computer. It seemed to her they might have some luck on a little stretch along Highway 12, some ways south of Bentonville.

She dug out that white dress and those red heels, reddened her lips and, bending from the waist, finger-combed her long blond hair.

She was hoping for a man-a lone man-as she had no doubt a man would stop for her. The dress sat snug on her curves, rode high on her thighs, and when she flipped her hair up again, it tumbled like a siren's.

She laughed, and shooed Darryl back when he tried to grab at her.

"You just wait, baby, you just wait. And stay out of sight now. A man comes along, he's going to stop to help me out for sure."

"He's gonna want to do more than that. Holy Jesus, Ella-Loo, you're sexy as black lace panties. I got a boner so big it's killing me just looking at you."

"That's the idea. If a woman comes along, she might stop, might not. A couple of men will, a couple of women might. Mix it up, it's back to maybe. But sooner or later, baby."

She ran her finger over his mouth, gave him a grind, crotch to crotch, that made him moan before she nudged him away.

"More of that later, honey. It's not full dark yet. People are more inclined to stop to help before it gets dark. Go on back in that brush there. I've got to look helpless, and I won't when I've got myself a strong, handsome man beside me."

She'd chosen the spot well-maybe too well as the sun dipped lower without a single vehicle passing going either way.

"I maybe could get it running again," Darryl called out. "Enough to get to a motel or a town, just boost something there."

"This is going to work, Darryl." She had her mind set on it. "We just have to-I see a car coming. When he stops, give me some time to play it up. Then you come out, baby, and take care of it. You'll take care of it, won't you, Darryl?"

"You know I will."

She stood beside the car, hands clasped together as if in prayer, big blue eyes wide with what she hoped came off as a little hope, a little fear.

She loved playacting.

And she felt her excitement rise as the car-and a fine one, too-slowed. The man lowered the window, angled across the seat. "Having some trouble?"

"Oh, yes, sir. I surely am." Older, she noted, maybe right around fifty, so he'd be easy for Darryl to knock out, tie up, and drag off into the brush. "It just up and died on me. I tried getting hold of my brother-it's his truck-but my 'link must be broken, or maybe I forgot to pay the service fee. I'm always forgetting something."

"You didn't forget to fuel up, did you?" he asked.

"Oh, no, sir. That is, my brother, Henry, had it topped right off. That's Henry Beam (the name of her U.S. history teacher back in high school) from Fayetteville? Maybe you know him-it seems everybody knows Henry."

"I'm afraid I don't. I'm not from around here. Let me pull up in front of you, and I'll take a look."

"Thank you so much. I just didn't know what I was going to do. It's getting dark, too."

He pulled up. His car was a shiny silver, and though she'd have liked red-just like her shoes-she wouldn't complain. She fluttered around when he told her to unlock the hood, so he reached into the truck, released the latch himself.

He had a nice wrist unit, she noted, silver and shiny like the car. She wanted Darryl to have it.

"I don't know much about trucks," he began, "so if it's not an easy fix, I can take you into Bentonville. You can use my 'link to get in touch with your brother."

"That's so nice of you. I was afraid somebody maybe not so nice would stop, and I didn't know what to do." She glanced toward the brush, kept up a chatter to mask the rustling Darryl made as he came out. "My ma's going to be worrying soon if I'm not back, so if you're going to Bentonville, that would be just fine. She'll thank you herself for bringing me home."

"I thought you said Fayetteville."

"What? Oh, Henry," she began.

Something must have shown in her eyes or he heard the quiet step of Darryl's boot, as he

reared back, turned just as Darryl raised the tire iron. It struck the man on the shoulder. And he leaped at Darryl like a demon from hell.

It happened so fast—the flying fists, the animal grunts and snarls. Thinking only of Darryl, Ella-Loo snatched up the tire iron that had spun out of his hand, tried to get a solid grip. She swung, striking the now raging Good Samaritan hard across the back, realized her mistake when it didn't stop him. The next time, she aimed for the legs.

One of them buckled—she clearly heard a crack. Even hurt he managed to swing around, backhand her. Before she could steady herself, try for the other leg, Darryl went crazy.

"Put your hands on my woman, I'll kill you!"

He pummelled, fist flying, eyes wild, teeth bared. She barely had time to scramble clear before the man, unbalanced on his bad leg, face bloody, fell back.

His head struck the front bumper of the truck, bounced off, then slapped against the pavement. Before she gave it a thought, she jumped in, smashed the tire iron across his face. Two hard blows.

He lay still now, eyes wide in his ruined face. Blood began to seep and pool under his head.

Ella-Loo's breath puffed like a steam engine, whooshing out as her body quivered. "Is he . . . is he dead?"

"Shit, Ella-Loo, shit." Staring down, Darryl pulled a bandanna out of his back pocket to mop at the sweat and blood on his face. "He looks dead to me."

"We killed him."

"Didn't do it on purpose. Shit, Ella-Loo. He hit you right in the face. I can't allow that. I can't let anybody hurt my girl."

"I didn't want him to get up and hit you again, either. So I . . . You got to get him off the road. Get him back behind all that brush, Darryl, and quick before somebody else comes. And you take his wallet, his wrist unit. Take anything he's got on him. Hurry."

She found a rag in the truck, wiped down the tire iron, then tossed it into the backseat of their new car.

"Take his clothes, too, baby."

"What?"

"Take everything. You never know, but hurry!"

She began hauling their things from the bed of the truck to the car. "Just put everything in the back, and we'll sort through it later."

Her heart hammered; her hands shook. But she moved fast and sure.

"We need to get everything of ours out of the truck, baby, and I guess we need to wipe the steering wheel and so on. Anything we think we've touched. I'll do that."

She did the best she could, then finished with Darryl's help as they didn't have much to transfer from truck to car. In ten minutes Darryl was behind the wheel with Ella-Loo beside him.

"Don't go over the speed limit now. We're just going to put some distance between us and that man and the truck."

She held on, a mile, five, ten. At twenty-five, she broke.

"Pull off, pull off! See that road there? God Almighty, pull off, Darryl, go back in the trees there."

"Are you gonna be sick, honey?"

"I can still smell his blood. It's on you. It's on me, too."

"It's all right, now. It's gonna be all right, now." He pulled off, bumped his way through some trees, stopped. "Honey."

"Did you see his face? His eyes staring at us, but not seeing us? And the blood coming out of his mouth. Of his ears."

She turned to him, her face lit like the sun, her eyes huge, full of wonder and want. "We killed somebody. Together."

They fell on each other. For them, sex was always hot, hard and heady, but now, with the smell of fresh blood, with the knowing, it turned feral until her screams, his shouts echoed in the car.

When they were done, when sweat fused their flesh together like glue and the white dress was tattered, stained with blood as red as her heels, she smiled at him.

"Next time, I don't want to do it so fast. We're going to take some time with the next one."

"I love you, Ella-Loo."

"I love you, Darryl. Nobody's ever loved like we do. We're going to have everything we want, do anything we want, from right here all the way to New York City."

The first kill, mostly an accident, took place on a hot night in August. By the time they arrived in New York, in mid-January, their tally was up to twenty-nine.

With her first look at New York, Ella-Loo had the same reaction she'd had with her first look at Darryl.

She knew th...

Other Books

Being Dead, Seven supernatural stories, all having something to do with death.

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