

Origin in Death

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Set in 2059 in New York City, the number-one bestselling In Death series has given fans a searing glimpse into near-future law and order. Now, as scientists work to expand the limits of technology, Detective Eve Dallas tracks the cunning, cold-blooded killer of a father and son.

A pioneer of modern reconstructive and cosmetic surgery, Dr. Wilfred B. Ilove, is found dead in his office—murdered in a chillingly efficient manner: one swift stab to the heart. Struck by the immaculate condition of the crime scene, Dallas suspects a professional killing. Security disks show a stunningly beautiful woman calmly entering and leaving the building—the good doctor's final appointment.

Known as "Dr. Perfect," the saintly Ilove devoted his life to his family and his work. His record is clean. Too clean for Dallas. She knows he was hiding something and suspects that his son—and successor—knows what it is. Then, like father, like son, the young Dr. Ilove is killed . . . with the same deadly precision.

But who is the mystery woman—and what was her relationship with the good doctors? While her husband, Roarke, works behind the scenes, Dallas follows her darkest instincts into the Iloves' pasts. What she discovers are men driven to create perfection—playing fast and loose with the laws of nature, the limits of science, and the morals of humanity.

Origin in Death proves once again the incredible appeal of Eve Dallas and the bestselling popularity of her creator. Whether writing as herself or as J. D. Robb, Nora Roberts continues to push the boundaries of suspense—and she takes delighted fans along for the ride.

J.D. Robb is the pseudonym for a number one New York Times bestselling author of more than 190 novels, including the futuristic suspense In Death series. There are more than 400 million copies of her books in print.

Blood is thicker than water.

-JOHN RAY

There will be time to murder and create.

-T.S. ELIOT

PROLOGUE

DEATH SMILED AT HER, AND KISSED HER GENTLY ON THE cheek. He had nice eyes. She knew they were blue, but not like the blue in her box of crayons. She was allowed to draw with them for one hour every day. She liked coloring best of all.

She could speak three languages, but she was having trouble with the Cantonese. She could draw the figures, and loved to make the lines and shapes. But it was hard for her to see them as words.

She couldn't read very well in any of the languages, and knew the man she and her sisters called Father was concerned.

She forgot things she was supposed to remember, but he never punished her-not like others did when he wasn't there. She thought of them as The Others, who helped the father teach her and care for her. But when he wasn't there, and she made a mistake, they did something that hurt her, and made her body jump.

She wasn't allowed to tell the father.

The father was always nice, just like he was now, when he sat beside her, holding her hand.

It was time for another test. She and her sisters took a lot of tests, and sometimes the man she called Father got wrinkles in his forehead, or a sad look in his eyes when she couldn't do all the steps. In some of the tests he had to stick her with a needle, or hook machines to her head. She didn't like those tests very much, but she pretended she was drawing with her crayons until they were over.

She was happy, but sometimes she wished they could go outside instead of pretending to go outside. The hologram programs were fun, and she liked the picnic with the puppy best of all. But whenever she asked if she could have a real puppy, the man she called Father just smiled and said, "Some day."

She had to study a lot. It was important to learn all that could be learned, and to know how to speak and dress and play music, and discuss everything she'd learned or read or seen on-screen during her lessons.

She knew her sisters were smarter, faster, but they never teased her. They were allowed to play together for an hour in the morning and an hour before bed, every day.

That was even better than the picnic with the puppy.

She didn't understand loneliness, or might have known she was lonely.

When Death took her hand, she lay quietly and prepared to do her best.

"This will make you feel sleepy," he told her in his kind voice.

He'd brought the boy today. She liked when he brought the boy, though it made her feel shy. He was older, and had eyes the same color blue as the man she called Father. He never played with her or her sisters, but she always hoped he would.

"Are you comfortable, sweetheart?"

"Yes, Father." She smiled shyly at the boy who stood beside her bed. Sometimes she pretended the little room where she slept was a chamber, like the ones in the castles she sometimes read about or saw on-screen. And she was the princess of the castle, under a spell. The boy would be the prince who came to save her.

But from what, she wasn't sure.

She hardly felt the needle stick. He was so gentle.

There was a screen in the ceiling over her bed, and today the man she called Father had programmed it with famous paintings. Hoping to please him, she began to name them as they slid on, then off.

"Garden at Giverny 1902, Claude Monet. Fleurs et Mains, Pablo Picasso. Figure at a Window, Salvador Da . . . Salvador . . ."

"Dalí," he prompted.

"Dalí . Olive Trees, Victor van Gogh."

"Vincent."

"I'm sorry." Her voice began to slur. "Vincent van Gogh. My eyes are tired, Father. My head feels heavy."

"That's all right, sweetheart. You can close your eyes, you can rest."

He took her hand while she drifted off. He held it tenderly in his while she died.

She left the world five years, three months, twelve days, and six hours after she'd come into it.

1

WHEN ONE OF THE MOST FAMOUS FACES ON OR off planet was beaten to a bloody, splintered pulp, it was news. Even in New York City. When the owner of that famous face punctured several vital organs of the batterer with a fillet knife, it was not only news, it was work.

Getting an interview with the woman who owned the face that had launched a thousand consumer products was a goddamn battle.

Cooling her heels in the plush-to-the-point-of-squishy waiting area of the Wilfred B. Icove Center for Reconstructive and Cosmetic Surgery, Lieutenant Eve Dallas was fully prepared to go to war.

She'd had just about enough.

"If they think they can turn me out a third time, they're ignorant of the greatness of my wrath."

"She was unconscious the first time." Content to lounge in one of the luxurious, overstuffed chairs and sip some complimentary tea, Detective Delia Peabody crossed her legs. "And heading into surgery."

"She wasn't unconscious the second time."

"Recovery and Observation. It's been less than forty-eight, Dallas." Peabody sipped more tea and fantasized what she would have done if she were here for face or body sculpting.

Maybe she'd just start with hair extensions. No pain, some gain, she decided, combing her fingers through her dark, bowl-cut 'do.

"And self-defense looks pretty clear."

"She put eight holes in him."

"Okay, maybe a little excessive, but we both know her lawyer's going to claim self-defense, fear of bodily harm, diminished capacity—all of which any jury's going to buy." Maybe blonde hair extensions, Peabody thought. "Lee-Lee Ten is an icon. Perfection of female beauty, and the guy played a mighty tune on her face."

Broken nose, shattered cheekbone, broken jaw, detached retina. Eve ran through the list in her head. She wasn't looking to hang a homicide on the woman, for God's sake. She'd interviewed the medical tech who'd treated Ten on-scene, and she'd investigated and documented the scene itself.

But if she didn't close this case down today, she was going to be dealing with the drooling hounds of the media yet again.

If it came to that, she'd be tempted to play a tune on Ten's face herself.

"She talks to us today, and we shut this down. Or I'm slapping her bevy of attorneys and reps with obstruction of justice."

"When's Roarke due home?"

With a frown, Eve stopped pacing long enough to look at her partner. "Why?"

"Because you're getting a little edgy . . . edgier than usual. I think you have Roarke-withdrawal." Peabody let out a wistful sigh. "Who could blame you?"

"I'm not having anything-withdrawal." She muttered it, and began pacing again. She had long legs on a long body, and felt a little confined in the overly decorated space. Her hair was shorter than her partner's, a deer-hide brown worn carelessly choppy around a lean face with large brown eyes.

Unlike many of the patients and clients of the Wilfred B. Iove Center, physical beauty wasn't one of her priorities.

Death was.

Maybe she missed her husband, she admitted. It wasn't a crime. In fact, it was probably one of those marriage rules she was still trying to learn after more than a year in the game.

It was rare for Roarke to take a business trip that lasted more than a day or two now, and this one had stretched to a week.

She'd pushed for it, hadn't she? she reminded herself. She was very aware he'd set a lot of his work aside in the past months to help with hers, or just to be there when she needed him.

And when a man owned or had interest in nearly every area of business, art, entertainment, and development in the known universe, he had to keep a lot of balls in the air.

She could handle not being juggled in for a week. She wasn't a moron.

But neither was she sleeping very well.

She started to sit, but the chair was so big, and so pink. It gave her an image of being swallowed whole by a big, shiny mouth.

"What's Lee-Lee Ten doing in the kitchen of her three-level penthouse at two in the morning?"

"Late-night snack?"

"AutoChef in her bedroom, another in the living area, one in each guest room, one in her home office, one in her home gym."

Eve wandered to one of the banks of windows. She preferred the dull, rainy day outside to the perky pink of the waiting area. Fall of 2059 had, so far, proved cold and mean.

"Everyone we've managed to interview stated that Ten had dumped Bryhern Speegal."

"They were completely the couple over the summer," Peabody put in. "You couldn't watch a celeb report on-screen or pick up a gossip mag without . . . not that I spend all my time on celebrity watch or anything."

"Right. She dumps Speegal last week, according to informed sources. But she's entertaining him in her kitchen at two in the morning. Both of them are wearing robes, and there is evidence of intimate behavior in the bedroom."

"Reconciliation that didn't work?"

"According to the doorman, her security discs, and her domestic droid, Speegal arrived at twenty-three fourteen. He was admitted, and the household droid was dismissed to its quarters-but left on-call."

Wineglasses in the living area, she thought. Shoes-his, hers. Shirt, hers. His was on the wide curve of the stairs leading to the second level. Her bra had been draped over the rail at the top.

It hadn't taken a bloodhound to follow the trail, or to sniff out the activity.

"He comes over, he comes in, they have a couple of drinks downstairs, sex comes into it. No evidence it wasn't consensual. No signs of struggle, and if the guy was going to rape her,

he wouldn't bother to drag her up a flight of steps and take off her clothes."

She forgot her image of the chair long enough to sit. "So they go up, slap the mattress. They end up downstairs, bloody in the kitchen. Droid hears a disturbance, comes out, finds her unconscious, him dead, calls for medical and police assistance."

The kitchen had looked like a war zone. Everything white and silver, acres of room, and most of it splashed and splattered with blood. Speegal, the hunk of the year, had been facedown, swimming in it.

Maybe it had reminded her, just a little too horribly, of the way her father had looked. Of course, the room in Dallas hadn't been so shiny, but the blood, the rivers of blood, had been just as thick, just as wet after she'd finished hacking the little knife into him.

"Sometimes there's no other way," Peabody said quietly. "There's no other way to stay alive."

"No." Edgy? Eve thought. More like losing her edge if her partner could see into her head that easily. "Sometimes there's not."

She rose, relieved when the doctor stepped into the room.

She'd done her homework on Wilfred B. Ilove, Jr. He'd stepped competently into his father's footsteps, oversaw the myriad arms of the Ilove Center. And was known as the sculptor to the stars.

He was reputed to be discreet as a priest, skilled as a magician, and rich as Roarke-or nearly. At forty-four, he was handsome as a vid star with eyes of light, crystalline blue in a face of high, slashing cheekbones, square jaw, carved lips, narrow nose. His hair was full, swept back from his forehead in gilded wings.

He had maybe an inch on Eve's five-ten, and his body looked trim and fit, even elegant in a slate gray suit with pearly chalk stripes. He wore a shirt the color of the stripes, and a silver medallion on a hair-thin chain.

He offered Eve his hand, and an apologetic smile that showed perfect teeth. "I'm so sorry. I know you've been waiting. I'm Dr. Ilove. Lee-Lee-Ms. Ten," he corrected, "is under my care."

"Lieutenant Dallas, NYPSP. Detective Peabody. We need to speak with her."

"Yes, I know. I know you've tried to speak with her before, and again, my apologies." His voice and manner were as groomed as the rest of him. "Her attorney's with her now. She's awake and stable. She's a strong woman, Lieutenant, but she's suffered severe trauma, physically and emotionally. I hope you can keep this brief."

"That'd be nice for all of us, wouldn't it?"

He smiled again, just a twinkle of humor, then gestured. "She's on medication," he continued as they walked down a wide corridor accented with art that highlighted the female form and face. "But she's coherent. She wants this interview as much as you do. I'd prefer it wait at least another day, and her attorney . . . Well, as I said, she's a strong woman."

Love passed the uniform stationed at his patient's door as if he were invisible. "I'd like to attend, monitor her during your interview."

"No problem." Eve nodded to the uniform, stepped inside.

It was luxurious as a suite in a five-star hotel, strewn with enough flowers to fill an acre of Central Park.

The walls were a pale pink, sheened with silver, accented with paintings of goddesses. Wide chairs and glossy tables comprised a sitting area where visitors could gather to chat or pass the time with whatever was on-screen.

Privacy screens on a sea of windows ensured the media copters or commuter trams that buzzed the sky were blinded to the room inside, while the view of the great park filled the windows.

In a bed of petal pink sheets edged with snow-white lace, the famous face looked as if it had encountered a battering ram.

Blackened skin, white bandages, the left eye covered with a protective patch. The lush lips that had sold millions in lip plumper, lip dye, lip ice, were swollen and coated with some sort of pale green cream. The luxurious hair, responsible for the production of bottomless vats of shampoo, conditioner, enhancements, was scraped back, a dull red mop.

The single visible eye, green as an emerald, tracked over to Eve. A sunburst of color surrounded it.

"My client is in severe pain," the lawyer began. "She is under medication and stress. I-"

"Shut up, Charlie." The voice from the bed was hoarse and hissy, but the lawyer thinned his lips and shut up.

"Take a good look," she invited Eve. "The son of a bitch did a number on me. On my face!"

"Ms. Ten-"

"I know you. Don't I know you?" The voice, Eve realized, was hissy and hoarse because Lee-Lee was speaking through clamped teeth. Broken jaw-had to hurt like a mother. "Faces are my business, and yours . . . Roarke. Roarke's cop. Ain't that a kick in the ass."

"Dallas. Lieutenant Eve. Detective Peabody, my partner."

"Bumped hips with him four-no five years ago. Rainy weekend in Rome. Holy God, that man's got stamina." The green eye sparked a moment with bawdy humor. "That bother you?"

"You bump hips with him in the last couple years?"

"Regretfully, no. Just that one memorable weekend in Rome."

"Then no, it doesn't. Why don't we talk about what happened between you and Bryhern Speegal in your apartment night before last?"

"Cocksucking bastard."

"Lee-Lee." This gentle admonishment came from her doctor.

"Sorry, sorry. Will doesn't approve of strong language. He hurt me." She closed her eyes, breath...

Other Books

Untamed, Life sucks when your friends are pissed at you. Just ask Zoey Redbird - she's become an expert on suckiness. In one week she has gone from having three boyfriends to having none, and from having a close group of friends who trusted and supported her, to being an outcast. Speaking of friends, the only two Zoey has left are undead and unMarked. And Neferet has declared war on humans, which Zoey knows in her heart is wrong. But will anyone listen to her? Zoey's adventures at vampyre finishing school take a wild and dangerous turn as loyalties are tested, shocking true intentions come to light, and an ancient evil is awakened in PC and Kristin Cast's spellbinding fourth House of Night novel. (Recommended for readers age 13 and older)

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