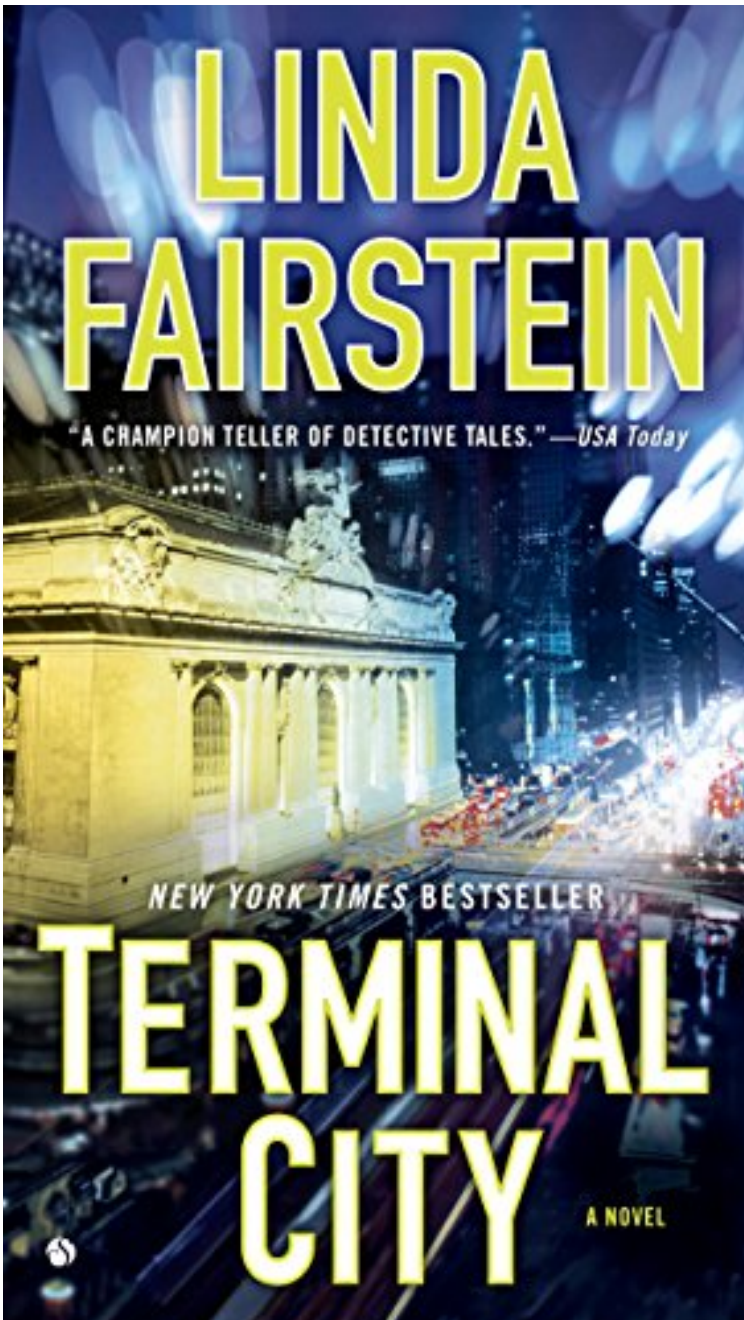


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# Terminal City



*Par Linda Fairstein*  
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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurWith her newest Alexandra Cooper novel, Terminal City, New York Times bestselling author Linda Fairstein delivers another breakneck thriller that captures the essence of New York Cityits glamour, its possibilities, and its endless capacity for darkness.Linda Fairstein is well-known for illuminating the dark histories in many of New Yorks forgotten cornersand sometimes in the citys most

popular landmarks. In Terminal City, Fairstein turns her attention to one of New York's most iconic structures Grand Central Terminal. From the worlds largest Tiffany clock decorating the 42nd Street entrance to its spectacular main concourse, Grand Central has been a symbol of beauty and innovation in New York City for more than one hundred years. But the worlds loveliest station is hiding more than just an underground train system. When the body of a young woman is found in the tower suite of the Waldorf Astoria one of the most prestigious hotels in Manhattan Assistant DA Alex Cooper and Detectives Mike Chapman and Mercer Wallace find themselves hunting for an elusive killer whose only signature is carving a carefully drawn symbol into his victims bodies, a symbol that bears a striking resemblance to train tracks. When a second body bearing the same bloody symbol is discovered in a deserted alleyway right next to the terminal building, all attention shifts to the iconic transportation hub, where the potential for a bigger attack weighs heavily on everyones minds. With the President of the United States set to arrive for a United Nations meeting at the weeks end, Alex and Mike must contend with Grand Centrals expansive underground tunnels and century-old dark secrets as well as their own changing relationship to find a killer who appears to be cutting a deadly path straight to the heart of the city. Excerpt\*\*\*This excerpt is from an advance uncorrected proof.\*\*\*Copyright 2014 by Linda Fairstein ONENot a pretty way to die, Alexandra. The lieutenant of Manhattan Souths Homicide Squad opened the door to the luxury hotel suite on the forty-fifth floor at the Waldorf Astoria on Park Avenue. You know of one, Loo? I asked, following him through the elegantly appointed living room. I mean a pretty way. Rocco Correlli shrugged his shoulders and shook his head. He had been on the job for almost thirty years and seen more corpses than most guys in the bureau could now lay claim to, as the citys murder rate continued its dramatic decline. Mike Chapmans got one. Pug McBride was behind me, practically stepping on my heels in his effort to stay close to Correlli. The short detective, square-bodied with a wrinkled face like the dog for which he was nicknamed, was as annoying as he was good-natured. Says hed like to die in bed with Gisele Bundchens body double fourth down, goal to go. Correlli stopped short at the open bedroom door. Shut it, Pug. Yeah, I guess thats why Mike got jammed up. In the wrong bed at the wrong time. I was wedged between Correllis back and McBrides barrel chest. His warm Marlboro-laced breath hit the back of my neck each time he opened his mouth. I trusted that neither man could see the color rise in my face at the mention of Chapmans name. I got the DA here, Correlli said to someone standing with the body inside the room. Better buy him a cocktail first. I saw the flash of a camera go off. The speaker was Hal Sherman, one of the great pros in the Crime Scene Unit, whose voice was all too familiar to me. Shes already had one, Hal. Was it Scotch? Hal said. Does that mean I actually drew the Coopster? Hey, Hal. You going to let me in? Sherman framed himself in the archway of the open door. Good evening, Alex. Id hoped you had better things to do tonight than come out on this one. You gotta learn to delegate, girl. Cant always be a control freak. I did delegate, as a matter of fact. Had one of the new kids in the unit on the chart. The Special Victims Unit of the District Attorneys Office, which I had headed for more than a decade, used an on-call system, just like the prosecutors working homicides. That meant we rode investigations 24/7 in partnership with the NYPD going to crime scenes, running lineups, interviewing suspects on video after the initial police interrogation all designed to enhance the viability of the legal case that developed from the evidence collected. What was the matter? No booties or gloves that fit her? I glanced down at my outfit. Rocco made me glove up before I got on the elevator in the lobby. Shes three months pregnant. Probably throws up enough every day without having to see this crap, too, Pug said. I rolled my eyes. When Mercer called me, he was figuring shed be on maternity leave by the time wed need to go to trial. Rocco Correlli stepped to the side. He had straight silver-gray hair, a bit too long around the edges, and strong features that complemented his lean, angular build. Thats assuming we catch the bastard. Alex always assumes that, Hal said. Its why she pushes us so hard. Mercer Wallace was the best Special Victims detective in the city and one of my closest friends. He had worked homicide for yearsthe highest-ranking African American in the squad and one of the few to be promoted to first grade but requested the transfer to SVU because he preferred working with survivors of violent crime to handling murders. His compassion and gentle nature had helped scores of women and children in their recovery from the trauma of sexual assault. Are we waiting for Mercer? I asked. Hes downstairs with hotel security, the lieutenant said, setting them up with a team of detectives to watch video surveillance tapes from the last seventy-two hours. No telling when hell get back up here. This place is vast. But there are so many cameras in the Waldorf, Loo. We could get lucky in a few hours, I said. From your lips. Now let me see the girl. Take a deep breath, Alex. Hal waved a licorice sucking candy under my nose. I opened my mouth and accepted it like a communion wafer, even though it was small protection against the powerful odor of death. I walked behind Hal, careful to avoid

the areas of thick beige carpeting that were stained a dark red. The heavy silk drapes, rose-colored with a rich brocade trim, were drawn shut. Lamps on the dresser and night tables were lighted, and Hals auxiliary spotlight equipment was directed at the unmade king bed. I skirted the chaise and sofa, then saw the body of the young woman, sprawled on her back on top of the rumpled sheets. My eyes arrested on her neck. Her head was turned to the side, away from me, but there was a slice deep into her flesh that extended from behind her ear down to the top of her throat and then across her slim neck till it disappeared out of my line of sight. Beneath the far side of her head the blood pooled and had seeped into the bedding. The killer had deposited drops large globs of the thick dark stains as he walked away from his victim. Those were the markings on the carpet that led out of this death chamber toward the front door. Had anything like this, Alex? Rocco had given me time to take in the scene. The well-toned body of the woman was exposed to all of us, memorialized in photographs that would be studied in a courtroom if I overcame an adversary's cry of prejudice, and soon to be dissected by a first-rate medical examiner in the grimmest room in New York City. My first instinct anything but prosecutorial was to restore some of her dignity and lift the sheet over her torso. Instead, I bit my lip and studied the position of the lower body legs splayed to reveal a patch of dark, curly pubic hair. No, I said. Nothing. The lieutenant wanted to know whether I had encountered any victims who had survived a similar assault and left for dead with a deep knife wound to the neck. Rocco Correlli would not have received reports of survivors from the Special Victims Unit, but my team would have known of anyone operating with a similar modus operandi. I folded my arms and stared at the body again, from the tips of her manicured toes to the lines that appeared to have been sliced by a sharp instrument into her upper thighs, past the gaping wound that killed her, to the top of her matted brunette hair. I'm sure you've checked with North. Rocco's superb team of homicide detectives covered the southern half of the island of Manhattan, responding to all the unnatural deaths that occurred from the lower border of Central Park on 59th Street to the tip of the Battery. Manhattan North had the rest of the real estate the park itself, the Upper East and Upper West Sides, Harlem and Spanish Harlem, to the border created by Spuyten Duyvil Creek, looking across to the Bronx. It was Detective Mike Chapman's turf, run by a veteran lieutenant named Ray Peterson, with whom I'd worked dozens of cases. Nada. It's like a monster that emerged from the deep and decided to commit a very professional job of slaughtering a broad smack in the middle of town, at one of the most prestigious addresses in Manhattan. No priors like it, nothing to suggest escalating from a pattern of serial rapes. It's like he came out of nowhere. Nobody comes out of nowhere, boss, Pug said. And disappeared back into nowhere, Rocco said, ignoring Pug McBride. Who is she? I said. No ID yet. You've asked me that three times. Impatience isn't your best feature. How about the suite? Whose is it registered to? Nobody. That's the thing. It's been empty for four days. Housekeeper came in around five p.m. to ready it for an arrival tomorrow. You thinking inside job? Hotel employee? Start there. Management made an effort to shut down the place well, slow it down anyway as soon as the 911 call went in. How is it possible to function if they do that? How many rooms have they got? One thousand five hundred and seven, including these suites in the Towers. The Waldorf Astoria occupied an entire square block, with a grand entrance fronting on Park Avenue, and rear doors several of them facing Lexington. Over time it had been home to Cole Porter, Bugsy Siegel, Marilyn Monroe, and General Douglas MacArthur. Its large ballroom was nightly the site of black-tie dinners for every New York City charity, national political fund-raiser, and rubber-chicken corporate event. So it's impossible to close the place off, Loo. They've been extremely cooperative. The night manager has called in all his supervisory staff and they're trying to account for everyone's whereabouts the last three days. The entire employee list is online, so we'll be doing background checks throughout the night. How long has she been dead? It wouldn't matter how intently I stared at the body. I couldn't help the woman, nor did I have Rocco's expertise in estimating things like time of death. I'm thinking day and a half, maybe more. No medical examiner? Johnny Mayes. I thought he'd beat you here. Mercer caught me on my way home. I wasn't far from the hotel. The District Attorney's Office was in Lower Manhattan, just north of city hall. My apartment was in a high-rise only twenty blocks north of the Waldorf. Most days I drove downtown to work, parking on the street with the laminated plaque that identified me as a prosecutor. I was only five minutes from the hotel when Mercer reached me at 7:20 this evening. I'll wait for him. Mayes was one of the best forensic pathologists in the country. I learned something every time he examined a body, explaining the damage each weapon had caused or the kind of force necessary to result in death. It was extremely comfortable to work with him, to know the deceased was in his capable hands, to witness how he teased so much information from a silent, often reluctant corpse. Take your last look, Alex. The lieutenant was fidgety, anxious to get me out of the way. The marks on her thighs, you make anything of them? Leave it

to the doc. They seem sort of superficial to me. I get that. I mean the cuts, you think they form any kind of design? Hal made photos, Rocco said, taking his gloved hands out of his pockets to lean in, his head directly over the girls flat abdomen, peering down at her scarred legs. Two parallel lines, kind of even, inch and a half long. With short strips going crosswise, like the rungs of a ladder. I mean they're really even. They look so deliberately drawn. Carved, not drawn. You've seen that before? I told you no, Rocco. I'm just thinking that here comes this killer who gets into the hotel, maybe he encounters his victim herein the hallway or even the barenirely by chance. The Bull and Bear was a fixture in the New York scene, regularly crowded with businessmen and lawyers, conventioners and tourists, highbrows and hookers. Maybe she works here, Pug said. They're scoping that out. There are thousands of staffers here. Must be ten at the front desk alone, Rocco said. The check-in area was so large it took up half the length of the lobby. You got house-keeping, kitchen and room service, engineering, reservations, maintenance, security, administration, a beauty parlor, a barber shop, a jewelry store that sells diamonds as big as the Ritz. Who'd even miss one girl? I tell you what, Pug said, with a sideways glance at the bed. That particular one I'd be missing. What I was saying is that somehow the killer gets in. Like he just walks in off the street. He meets the girl, Rocco. Or he comes in off Park Avenue with her, Pug said, interrupting again. That should show on the surveillance tapes. But it's a crime of impulse, don't you think? Why's that? Rocco said, pointing the way back to the living room. Because he didn't stop to take a room, did he? He never checked in. Nope. But how would he have known this suite was empty? Easy to get that information if he works here. I said. Or maybe he just got lucky trying doors. Could be he's a scam artist, burglarizing rooms with a master key card. My point is that if this was a rapean impulsive act and the girl resisted, the perp might have gone berserk and slit her throat to shut her up. I turned back to look at the body again, but Rocco made it clear he wanted me out. If you're waiting for her to wake up, Alex, you're out of luck. Move on now. But what doesn't fit with that kind of crime of opportunity are the marks he etched on her thighs, I said. Too neat. Way too carefully drawn. You can't have it both ways, Alex, Pug said. I'm just saying it's odd. The fatal wounds are inconsistent with the careful markings on her thighs. Disorganized killer versus very meticulous artist. Maybe he did the legs first, Rocco said. Maybe he tortured her. You couldn't look at the young woman's body and not think torture. I crossed the threshold into the living room. Rocco directed me through the door and across the hallway, into another suite that management had given him to use as a mini command center. Several uniformed cops nodded at me when I entered. Before too long it would be swarming with detectives from the local precinct and Major Case. Want some coffee? Rocco said. Sure. He poured us each a cup, then proceeded to tell me what his men would spend the night doing. Have you put out a photo of her yet? No way, Alex. Her clothes are gone, there's no form of ID around, and I can't release a picture until Johnny Mayes cleans her up. Are they doing a vertical search of the hotel? Waiting on Commissioner Scully to give me a platoon of guys to do that. There must be thirty elevator banks, staircases everywhere, and all those thousands of doors to knock on. It's Pug's case? Rocco Correlli took a sip of the hot coffee, scowling as he put it to his lips. Scully wants someone with more polish as the front man. Pug's too likely to step on his own dick when the first reporter goes after some off-the-record lead. Mercers on loan till we come up with a better idea. That makes it easy for me. Mercer and I had partnered more times than I could count. The word easy isn't in the mix, Alex. I've got to put a face and name to the body, quell the public hysteria about a murder in a Midtown landmark, and figure out who this madman is and where he came from. Not to mention where he went. I thought of the images of the two ladderlike designs on the victim's long legs. And who's at risk going forward. I've got less than a week to deliver. Scully understands what a massive job this will be. It will take that long to study the hotel's surveillance tapes, top to bottom of the building. He can't be serious about a deadline. Rocco Correlli rested his mug on the silver tray the manager had sent to the room. It has nothing to do with the commissioner, Alex. In less than a week, three floors of suites in the Waldorf Towers will be filled to capacity. The president of the United States will take up residence here for an emergency special session at the United Nations. T W O Maybe the White House ought to find POTUS another place to stay, I said, refilling my cup with strong black coffee and sitting back on a yellow flocked love seat, flanked by a pair of cops in deep-blue uniforms. Every president since Herbert Hoover has been put up at the Waldorf Towers. The whole entourage. Secret Service and NYPD make the run from here to the UN like clockwork, and they've got every inch of this place figured out, Rocco said. Besides, Scully's dep checked with all the major hotels in the zone. Mid-August? Every tourist and convention has a lock on all the acceptable places in town. But you won't even be done processing this one, will you? Crime Scene was here by five thirty tonight. Did a thorough job on the two rooms but Find anything? It's a hotel suite, Alex. You know how many fringing fingerprint overlays they got? Hundreds of

em. Not a clean lift in the place. Not even a partial in blood. Nothing on the porcelain surfaces in the bathroom. It all suggests a total pro. Rocco put his coffee down and started for the door. Forget your impulsive rapist. Dont blow me off like that. There were detectives and supervisors who welcomed the insights of my senior colleagues, men and women who had worked the toughest cases shoulder to shoulder with their NYPD counterparts for many years. Rocco wanted to pick my brain about the sex crimes aspect of this case, but he didnt care for guidance about his hunt for a murderer. You interrupted me, he said sharply.

What did the guys find in the room, you want to know? No prints of value. Some trace evidence to be analyzed, probably from the maid service or a recent guest. Blood on the bed and on the floor most likely the killer had spatter on his clothes. Didnt stop here to wash up, though. Got away somehow, and may have left with the deceaseds belongings, too. Cool character. Maybe two of them. Crime Scene must have a ton more work in the building, I said, leaning forward. Second team was pulled in from the Bronx. The hotel is like an anthill full of cops. You know how many people guests, visitors, employees, deliverymen have pressed elevator buttons for the forty-fifth floor in the last two days? Theyre dusting and scraping and looking for specks of blood, but its crazy, Alex. Give me a perv who likes to do his business in a small walk-up or a tiny boutique hotel or even a flophouse on the Bowery. Not so many flophouses left down there, Loo. Yeah, well, this killer could have targeted the Surrey or the Carlyle, some fancy digs further uptown in Manhattan North.

He had to do this on my watch? Peterson doesnt need another headache, I said. The citys last high-profile homicide had taken place in Central Park, almost two months earlier, in June. It left me shattered for several weeks and resulted in Mike Chapman being suspended without pay for twenty-one days. Hed been burned by the embarrassment of his punishment for a personal transgression, then added a month of vacation to the rip imposed by the department to visit family in Ireland. Like you do? Rocco said. Kiss your weekend plans goodbye. No jaunting up to Marthas Vineyard on Friday. Guess not. But I had already ditched plans to fly up to my house, even though August was high season and many of the friends I didnt get to see all year spent part of this month at the beach. Mike was coming home at the end of this week, and he had asked me to have dinner with him on Saturday night. Our ten-year friendship, marked by an intense professional partnership that had circled around the prospect of personal intimacy for so long, had taken a slight turn on a June night, in the middle of Central Park. Mikes suspension, and his European travels, had given me far too much time to think about what might be next. My anxiety level was high. You got anything from Mercer? Sorry? What did you ask me? Dont zone out on me, Alex. The night is young. I checked for a text. Hell be up here within the hour. Before nine o'clock. In between that last murder investigation in Central Park and this one, the sweltering summer heat had added to the volatility of feuds. Drug gangs in Brooklyn were responsible for three shootings in July, the usual domestics left six women dead citywide, and an array of road rage, drunk drivers, deranged psych patients for whom there was no place in mental facilities had spiked the murder rate.

The Manhattan District Attorneys aggressive and creative crime strategies had taken the figures to a dramatic new low, but the recent blip in numbers had everyone questioning whether the cycle was trending up again or if the brutal weather patterns had simply ignited violent tempers. A detective appeared in the doorway. Excuse me, Loo. The medical examiners on his way up, and I just got a call from the housekeeper over in the ER. Shes stable and theyre sending her home. Whats wrong with her? I got to my feet and walked toward Rocco. Palpitations. Totally freaked out by finding the body, Rocco said. Thought she was having a heart attack. Two of the men from the Seventeenth Precinct who got to the scene early took a good statement from her. We did elimination prints and swabbed her mouth for DNA. He turned back to the detective. Tell the housekeeper we might need her to be available for a re-interview tomorrow. See if her memory improves once she calms down. Memory problems? I asked. Ill show you the notes. Saw nothing, heard nothing. Im not sure she was so clueless, or that she just doesnt want to be involved. You can take a run at her when youre ready. I slipped past the detective and let Rocco give the man his next orders. I paced the hallway in front of the elevator bank, waiting for Johnny Mayes to step off. At forty-five, he had established a solid reputation as a brilliant pathologist who worked well with the senior prosecutorial staff. Once he finished his site exam, the young womans body would be removed to the chief medical examiners office where Mayes would perform the autopsy, probably tomorrow. Johnny, I said, greeting him as he stepped off the elevator, wheeling his equipment bag behind him. Alexandra Cooper, he said, bowing at the waist. Did they shoot you out of a cannon? Have I kept you terribly long? He was about the same height as I five feet ten but his stout build was a distinct contrast to my slim frame. Mayes was a wine enthusiast whose refined tastes and interests seemed to lift him out of the dark world in which he spent an inordinate amount of his time. Not at all. I pointed the way to the suite and we walked the long corridor together. Im waiting for Mercer to come

back up here so we can make a plan, and everyone's terribly curious to hear what you have to say. The manager brought up fresh coffee if you need a jump start. Ill take it, he said. Whove we got? Rocco? And Pug. Johnny smirked as he turned his head to me. Seriously? And wholl do damage control for his mouth? That falls to me, Id guess. You have thoughts on this yet? Waiting for your observations, Doc. Mayes unzipped his bag and reached in for a gown to wear over his long-sleeved shirt. He turned so that I could tie the strips behind his back. He leaned on my shoulder while he covered his brown leather shoes with booties, then fitted himself into a pair of gloves. Lots of blood, I understand. Understatement. You game for a forensic adventure, Alex? My office had pioneered the courtroom introduction of some of the most advanced scientific techniques since we attempted to use DNA technology unsuccessfully in a 1986 homicide. Paul Battaglia, the long-time district attorney, had thrown his support behind unconventional approaches to solving crime. Biologists at the OCME lab gave us ground-breaking tools, from familial searches of genetic matches via blood relatives of a suspect, to my recent Frye hearing on the use of an FST Forensic Statistical Tool to evaluate evidentiary material with low mixtures, rather than complete profiles, determining the probability the substance contained the perps DNA. Id like to try a homicide with just a straightforward cause of death for a change. And a blood-soaked perp fleeing the scene whos in custody before he hits the pavement. Come ahead then, girl. I might be able to give you the former. Whats the adventure? I asked as he tapped on the door of the victims suite. A hyperspectral imaging device that can date blood samples, perhaps to within an hour of the time they were deposited, Mayes said, as Rocco opened the door. The holy grail of forensic technology. Hey, Johnny, Rocco said, howve you been? Hal Sherman and Pug McBride came out of the bedroom. Hot. How about you, Lieutenant? Just got orders to cancel my vacation. Hot and bothered is how I am. The dead girls in the other room. Anybody move her? Turn her over? Mayes pointed a gloved finger at Rocco Correlli, then Pug and Hal. You crazy? Of course not. Pug said. Scouts honor. I know how it is when youre looking to identify a body, gentleman. Objects have a tendency to shift in flight. An impetuous detective had screwed up a homicide of mine by rolling the body over before the medical examiner arrived, hoping to find a drivers license or wallet in her jeans pocket, making it impossible for the pathologists to know the exact pattern of the bloodstains. I didnt think shed be laying naked on top of her library card, Doc. No problem waiting for you. May I? Stay out here, Alexandra, will you? Mayes said. Let me do this with Pug. I expect Dr. Azeem will be here shortly. He can explain to Rocco and you what our experiment will be. Dont be experimenting on my scorecard, Johnny, the lieutenant said. Dr. Mayes walked to the threshold and peered into the room. Im going to guess that someone sliced this young womans jugular vein. I will trust your most excellent men, he said, with the formality of speech that characterized his style, to find the executioner as quickly as possible. The more difficult issue will be figuring how this victim was led to slaughter, and precisely when it happened. Azeem? I heard him lecture in England in the spring. Teesside University. He happens to be here this week presenting his findings at Columbia. He offered the opportunity to give me a firsthand sampling of the prototype. What does the device do, exactly? I asked. She means whats so frigging holy about it, Rocco said. The imaging scans for the visible spectrum of hemoglobin with extraordinary levels of laboratory accuracy. The only effective way of dating blood currently is centuries old, my friends, Mayes said, his gloved hands clasped together on the bulge above his waist. Dr. Azeem may be able to tell us, right here in this room within the hour what the time of death was. I assume if we pinpoint that, it might save your men a huge amount of time. Rocco whistled. And spare them endless hours of looking at videotapes of revolving doors and cement staircases. Let me get to work. And you might tell the manager that when Im done, I would prefer a fine glass of Montepulciano to chase down this lukewarm coffee on his hospitality cart. Johnny Mayes disappeared into the bedroom. Go figure, Rocco said, leading me back to the suite across the hall. Come out of there and drink a glass of blood-red wine? Ill stick to my vodka, and it cant come soon enough. I walked to the window and stared out at the dusky sky, at the last bit of light from behind the tall buildings to the west. I looked down at the tiny figures on the sidewalk so far below pedestrians, making their way to trains or subways or restaurants nearby. Even though the rush hour traffic had abated, the strip fronting the Waldorf, Park Avenue between 49th and 50th Streets, was one of the busiest crossroads in Manhattan. Missing Persons have anything to say? Give it a break, Alex. She might not be missing all that long yet. Dr. Shazam Azeem. Whatever. He and his amazing machine are supposed to solve that piece of the puzzle, arent they? I sat back down on the couch and put my feet up on the coffee table, checking my BlackBerry for e-mails and texts. Blood expert on the way, I texted to Mercer. You might want to be here. Pug crossed over to stand in the doorway. Confirmation on the seminal fluid in the pubic area, Alex. Mayes asked me to tell you. The doctor had used a blue LED to fluoresce the dried fluid on the

victims skin and matted in her hair. District Attorney Battaglia wasn't into electronic communication. He wanted to hear the news the old-fashioned way, catching hesitation in his lawyer's answers if they were uncertain of facts, picking up on the tonality of the voice of the reporter, allowing him to cross-examine before you had time to think of a response that could be abbreviated by a few keystrokes. I called Paul Battaglia to tell him that I was at the Waldorf and that initial observations supported the view that this was a rape-homicide of an unidentified woman, probably in her late twenties, whose jugular vein had been severed by the sharp blade of a knife. He had the usual concerns. Not the condition of the woman's body or the quality of our investigative work, but how this murder would impact his political standing. He'd want to know what church her mother attended so he could plan to be at Sunday's service, and whether there would be any victim's group rallies that might disrupt his schedule, requiring his attendance at a candlelight vigil, or something that might deprive him of a chance to golf with his son-in-law on Sunday morning. Hal Sherman joined Pug McBride in the corridor. His voice boomed and I whipped around, ending my phone call as Hal shouted, Look who's back from the dead. I knew he wasn't talking about the body on the bed. Who is? I asked. Hal backed up and a short gentleman with dark skin, straight black hair, and wire-rimmed glasses entered the room. As he stepped toward me with an extended hand, introducing himself as Fareed Azeem, Mike Chapman came into view, slapping Hal's back as his old friend embraced him. Then Mike led the others into the suite where Rocco and I were working. Hey, Loo. Here's the magician Johnny Mayes has been talking about. Azeem smiled and greeted Rocco Correlli. Nobody said Chapman was dead, Rocco said as he shook hands with Dr. Azeem. He just needed an attitude adjustment. And a lock for the zipper on his private parts. There was no mistaking my full-on blush for the warmth of the August night now. What about you, Coop? Mike asked, running his fingers through his thick black hair, flashing his best grin. Miss me? Once a week at least, Mike. Maybe twice. Whenever I thought it had been too long since anyone had taken a jab at me. I hadn't realized you'd come home. I didn't want to squirm in front of this crew of professionals, but I was steaming because Mike hadn't called me to say he had returned a few days earlier than expected. Need-to-know basis only. I told you that, kid. Taking it slow. That last phrase was Mike's, the one he had used when he kissed me on the rooftop of the Arsenal on a pitch-perfect June night. Taking what slow? Rocco asked. I reached for a legal pad in my tote bag. Anything to avoid playing out this stilted reunion in front of the Manhattan South Homicide Squad. Am I interrupting something here, Alex? the lieutenant asked. Or is this just the usual Chapman foreplay? Sorry, Rocco. I've been waiting for Mike to get home so we could tie up some loose ends on a pending case. She hates to be the last to know, Loo. Bad habit of hers. I turned to Fareed Azeem. I understand you're going to help Dr. Mayes establish our victim's time of death, Doctor. I don't want to get in the way, Ms. Cooper, he said, nodding his head in my direction. But I believe I can assist with that. It could be critical in this case, if we can limit the window in which the perp committed the crime and escaped from this fortress. It would save the detectives days of wasted hours canvassing or sitting in front of video screens. Yes, ma'am. It's rather a mammoth hotel. Dr. Mayes is across the hallway. Let me take you over to him. Hal motioned to Azeem to follow as Rocco Correlli charged ahead. Mike moved back to let them through, while I tried to stay close on the heels of the highly touted forensic guru. I didn't see any point in being alone with Mike. So really, Coop, did you miss me? he said, playfully poking me in the side as I passed him. Any day now I might have started to. You look skinny, kid. How much weight did you lose pining away for me? Mike grabbed my arm to try to hold me in place. Neither weight nor sleep. I broke loose and kept walking. Hey, Coop. Turn around a minute. What is it, Detective? I worried my annoyance and hurt were palpable. Death becomes you, Ms. Cooper, Mike said. It brings color to your cheeks. THREE Johnny Mayes sipped a glass of wine as the rest of us settled into place in the mini command center on the Waldorf's forty-fifth floor. Mercer was beside me on the love seat, while Mike leaned on the mantel over the gas fireplace. Hal and Pug pulled up armchairs near the coffee table, and Rocco and Azeem were on opposite ends of the long sofa. It was nine fifteen and there was no sign that the business portion of the evening would end soon. It will come as no surprise to any of you that this young lady died as a result of exsanguination, Johnny said. The instrument of causation—the knife or other cutting tool—had an extremely sharp tip. A needle point, I might say, which perforated the skin quite easily behind the right ear. There is a very regular and steady path sliced across her neck, which severed the jugular vein and occasioned the outpouring of blood onto her body and the bed-sheets. I swallowed hard and stared at a spot on the wall above Johnny Mayes's head. I say regular because it is so even, so unfluctuating, that it would appear that this victim offered no resistance to the assailant. She seems not to have struggled or moved during the time of the cutting, nor are there any defensive wounds on her hands or lower arms. Her fingernails are all intact.

Polished a pale pink and not even chipped. But it's the neck wound that killed her, Pug said, or the blood flow wouldn't have been so dramatic. She was alive when he slit her throat, Pug. Drugged, perhaps, but alive. Why do you say drugged? I asked. You think she's a junkie? Any marks on her body? Nothing to suggest that, Alex. Several things make me think you won't find any photographs of her on the hotel videos. I don't think she came in here under her own steam. How then? Mercer said. It's her back, my friends. Her back and the skin on the rear of her thighs and legs. Two things of note, Johnny said, stopping to sip his wine. There are more of those so-called ladders you saw on her thigh, Alex. All on her lower back. Four of them. I'll have a set of photos to you tomorrow, Hal said to me. Did they cause any injury? None at all. I see you're wincing, Alex. I'm sure the young lady was too intoxicated involuntarily to know. There is also a pattern not in high definition but sort of vaguely apparent on her skin. Especially her shoulders, her buttocks, and the rear of her legs. You want a guess about why I think she didn't walk in through the lobby? All I can give you is my hunch. Mike started to pace. He rarely stood still when his mind was in gear. Shoot. There's a faint imprint actually on her forearms, too. Just on the surface of her skin, not dug into it, Johnny turned to me as he spoke. It looks like a lining of some kind, a motif from the interior of a box or container. Imagine a wallpaper design in a faded red pattern that stamped onto her skin because it was wet. In this heat, enclosed in some kind of container, moisture from her sweat would have collected quickly. Any ideas? I asked. I'm thinking of something large enough, obviously, to conceal a body. Something used to transport or move an object or a piece of furniture. You're supposed to be helping us, Johnny, Mike said, one hand in the pocket of his jeans and the other waving in a circle over his head. You got an enormous square block of Manhattan real estate with exits and entrances on all sides and its own parking garage underneath. Deliveries are made every hour, day and night. Enough food to stock all the restaurants and room service, pallets filled with linens and laundry, boxes full of flower arrangements the size of small trees, and musicians hauling instruments of every conceivable size and shape up to the ballroom. Johnny Mayes tried to get a word in. But there is. That's before you start with the guests and the transients. Do you ever get held up in Park Avenue traffic by a minivan unloading a family of five with suitcases and backpacks and duffel bags that look like they could hold Mercer's six-foot-four inches? I did a security detail two years back. Should have been your last one, Chapman, Pug said, enjoying the chance to lob a crack at Mike. You could have saved yourself some embarrassment. None of the rest of us laughed with him. Nice having you at my back, Pug. Like I was saying, I had this detail with one of the Saudi princes. Picked him up at JFK in an SUV and we needed a caravan to get his luggage here. Right to the Waldorf. Could have had a camel, a two-humper even, in one of the trunks he was carting around. Stick with the idea of trunks for a minute, Johnny Mayes said, placing his glass on the tray. I'm quite sure we're not dealing with something commercial, like a wooden packing crate. The markings would have been entirely different. Strips of wood several inches thick, and certainly unlined. I would have expected to find shavings or splinters in the girl's hair or on her body. A cardboard one, perhaps, but that wouldn't be likely to have any design on the inside, would it? It would be a far cheaper product than wood. You're saying she might have been carried into the Waldorf inside a trunk? Mercer asked. You're all so quick to buy into this. She didn't walk, Johnny said. I'm betting good money on that. Wheeled, Pug said. Wheeled in, not carried. Fits with Crime Scene findings. They think there were indentations in the carpet. We actually disregarded them, figuring it was a room service cart from a few days ago. Mike slapped his palm against his forehead, but Pug was oblivious to the gesture. Not all the way into the bedroom, but in the entryway to the suite. That's where they picked up some of the trace evidence. Dirt and debris. It's not the wheeled versus carried that stops your heart, Mercer said. This girl was alive, then stuffed inside a box or container of some kind for the purpose of getting her in here? To die in a suite in one of the most luxurious hotels in the world? I don't begin to know the purpose, Johnny said. I'm just telling you that the end game was in that suite. I'd say she was drugged to unconsciousness although toxicology results may take weeks to tell us with whether body folded practically in half to be concealed in a large suitcase or trunk, and that she was brought to the forty-fifth floor of this hotel to be raped and murdered. She died right on that bed. Why? I said. Mercer's right. For what possible reason? I won't pretend to be of any help on that count. Any preliminary estimate of when she died? Rocco Correlli asked. Johnny lifted his glass again, tilting it in the direction of Fareed Azeem. I'd say the game is afoot, my friend, but it would be in such bad taste. A pathologist outside his morgue versus a chemist with his portable new filter. I'm at such a disadvantage, Fareed. Shall I go first? Azeem gestured his consent with both hands. It's now Tuesday evening, after nine p.m. I'd put the time of death at somewhere between noon and six p.m. yesterday. Of course that's before I get to gastric contents and all that. The rigor, the appearance of the body, the color of the blood. That's the best

you can give me? the lieutenant asked. Half a day? That costs me a dozen men stuck on more than a hundred video monitors in real time. They can always fast-forward em, Loo, Pug said. Bore me to tears to look at those empty corridors on surveillance tapes. Hence my introduction to the amazing Dr. Azeem. Ill come closer after tomorrows autopsy, but lets see what he can tell us. No insects, I said softly. I didnt see any activity, or any obvious decomposition, despite the intense heat. Youd think if it were more than twenty-four hours ago . . . The air conditioner was on full blow when uniform responded, Pug said. It was like a meat freezer in here, Alex. Let me go back across the hall and check my camera, Azeem said. Ill give you a reading of the machine and explain the result. He stood up and walked out of the room. This imprint youve described on the girls back, Mike said. Is it distinctive enough to give us a clue? The design may be fairly common, Johnny said. Sort of chevron-shaped print, perhaps on a linen cloth that lined a piece of luggage. But there are also letters, some of which are quite easy to make out. Theres an uppercase G, followed by an a or an o. In some instances the next one appears to be a v or maybe a y. It hasnt left the same impression in every place because of the natural protrusions of the bonier parts of the body. Its clear on the hips and on the shoulder blades, but then you lose the markings in the small of the victims back. The curvature there obviously didnt make contact with the patterned fabric. Any other specifics? I asked. I was playing with the first few symbols on my pad. Seems to end with the letter d. Goyard, I said, filling in the blanks and sketching the familiar design that adorned all the companys products. Probably the oldest trunk maker in existence. Nineteenth-century Parisian. They teach you that at Wellesley, kid? Mike said. Give me a broad with a little class, an inherited fortune, a lot of foreign travel to see her old flame, and Ill show you a prosecutor right in her element. Voil. Could be the murderers a French chef, with a suitcase full of carving knives, out to avenge a broken heart. Im telling you, Coops going to crack this case. Shell get her personal shopper right on it. I was trying to laugh at Mikes digs rather than take umbrage. I wondered whether he was back to his old ways of putting me down just to save face in front of Rocco Correlli, or if his extended vacation had cooled the affection he had finally expressed two months ago. Hard not to be noticed with a friggin trunk, Pug said. In the Waldorf Astoria? Everybodys wandering through the hallways with a wheeler bag. The lieutenant said. Whats this Goyard stuff, Alex? Very pricey. Used by half the royals of Europe and tons of celebrities. The Duchess of Windsor never went anywhere without a flock of their steamer trunks. Luggage like that would be perfectly in place in the Tower suites, the bigger the better. Too much trouble for a rape, Mike said, waving me off. What is it? Lets say the girl was drugged. She was clearly someplace remote enough when that happened that this perv could have Or pervs, Hal said. Whichever. They were able to stuff her into a huge trunk. Why not just rape her there, wherever they were? Wherever there was. Finish her off. Why all the drama of staging a scene in the Waldorf? Because theres a much bigger picture, you think, I said, following Mikes lead. Exactly. So how fast can you solve that puzzle for the commissioner? So if this is a one-off, were looking for a serial killer or a pair of them, Mercer said, jotting notes in his steno pad. Bold setting, the Waldorf. It would be too intimidating for an amateur, so theyve likely done this before. Youve got to check all the big metro hotels around the country. Maybe it has nothing to do with the fact that this is a fancy hotel, Mike said. Maybe its a political statement. The president on his way here. Some high-level meeting at the UN a month before the annual General Assembly deal in September. A chance for the killer to make big waves. To make a tsunami, actually. Unlikely this has political blowback, Rocco said, shaking his head. The presidential invitation and setup was last minute, Rocco said. The White House pooh-bahs are pulling the man back from his vacation in Yellowstone. Swept the reunion of brain surgeons or whatever hot-shit group had these rooms blocked off over to a downtown Marriott. If this murder was so well planned, it had to have been set in motion before this special session was confirmed. So there could be another target in the Waldorf. Could be a setup to embarrass some other head of state or business leader. I got two guys going over that list with the assistant manager right now. What we need is a make on the dead girl. Ill have her stitched back up for a photo you can use by tomorrow afternoon, Johnny said. Fareed Azeem came back into the room, removing his vinyl gloves and tossing his booties in the trash can. What can you give us, Dr. Azeem? the lieutenant asked. All indications are that the young lady died between two and three p.m. yesterday. Well within the time frame Johnny targeted, but I can pinpoint it to that hour, if that is of any help. Tremendous help. That will streamline what were looking at. I might add, Mr. McBride, that your team may have missed some blood in the room where the body was found. Not likely, Doc, Pug said defensively. Fine-tooth comb and all that. You found a stain you think they missed? Show me where. Not a stain, sir, but rather a spot. A spot? Get real, Doc. A spot on one of the panels of the curtains. Rose-colored curtains draped the windows of the room. How could one see a microscopic amount of blood against that back-drop? I think

the lab will have more than enough blood from that vic to work with. It isn't her blood, Mr. McBride. It might well be the killers. It was left on the curtain at least an hour after the girl was slaughtered. *Revue de presse* Praise for Linda Fairstein: The Queen of Intelligent Suspense. Lee Child "A champion teller of detective tales." -USA Today Alex Cooper is a fascinating heroine...based on the equally fascinating life of her creator. O, The Oprah Magazine "One of the best crime fiction writers in America today." - Nelson DeMille "Every page...is brimming with the kind of you-are-there reality that can only come from someone who has been there, seen it, done it." - Michael Connelly on *Killer Heat* "Linda Fairstein writes tough, beautiful prose about a world she knows first hand." - Lisa Scottoline on *Cold Hit* Fairstein is superbly attuned to the sinister vibes of the famous, as well as forgotten, New York City locales. Maureen Corrigan, NPR.org Long before sex crimes became everyday fictional fare on America's favorite cop shows, Linda Fairstein was in court and on the streets working ripped-from-the-headlines cases." USA Today Praise for *Terminal City* "Need a good thriller that describes the intricate details and history of one of New York City's better known landmarks? Then Fairstein's 16th adventure with Assistant DA Alexandra Cooper is just the ticket." -Library Journal (starred review) "It doesn't get better than this." -BookReporter Praise for *Death Angel* Engrossing. Publishers Weekly Praise for *Night Watch*: Fairstein's extensive prosecutorial experience adds authenticity to this thrilling procedural, a tasty soufflé of escargots, Beaujolais, cocaine, and murder that will entice the author's many fans. Library Journal As always, Manhattan becomes a character in itself, with the spotlight shining here on the inner workings of the restaurant industry in all its complexity, splendor, and corruption. A real winner from a legal-thriller master. Booklist