

KARIN
Slaughter

AFTER
THAT
NIGHT



HarperCollins *Publishers*

HarperCollinsPublishers Ltd
1 London Bridge Street,
London SE1 9GF

www.harpercollins.co.uk

HarperCollinsPublishers
Macken House,
39/40 Mayor Street Upper,
Dublin 1
D01 C9W8
Ireland

This paperback edition 2024

1

First published in Great Britain in 2023 by HarperCollinsPublishers

Copyright © Karin Slaughter 2023

Will Trent is a trademark of Karin Slaughter Publishing LLC.

Karin Slaughter asserts the moral right to
be identified as the author of this work

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-0-00-849943-3 (PB b-format)

ISBN: 978-0-00-849944-0 (PB a-format)

This novel is entirely a work of fiction. The names, characters and incidents portrayed in it are the work of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events or localities is entirely coincidental.

Typeset in Sabon LT Std by Palimpsest Book Production Ltd,
Falkirk, Stirlingshire

Printed and Bound in the UK using 100% Renewable Electricity at CPI Group (UK) Ltd

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publishers.



This book contains FSC™ certified paper and other controlled sources to ensure responsible forest management.

For more information visit: www.harpercollins.co.uk/green

For Liz

Remember to speak from the scar, not the wound.

Anonymous

Good morning Dani I really enjoyed the other night . . . not often I get to be with someone who's smart as well as beautiful . . . rare combination.

???

I've got the contact info for the Stanhope campaign if you're still interested in volunteering?

Who is this?

Funny! I know they are looking for canvassers are you still interested in helping?
I could pick you up on my way to campaign HQ if you want?

I'm sorry I think you have the wrong person

You're on Juniper in the Beauxarts bldg right?

No I moved in with my boyfriend

I love your sense of humor, Dani
Really want to spend more time with you
I know you love taking in the view of the park from your corner bedroom
Maybe you can introduce me to Lord Pantaloons

How do you know about my cat?

I know everything about you.

Srsly did Jen put you up to this?
Yr creeping me out

I keep thinking about that mole on your leg and
how I want to kiss it
. . . again . . .

Who the fuck is this?

Do you really want to know?

This isn't funny. Tell me who the fuck you are.

There's a pen and paper
In the drawer beside your bed
Make a list of everything that terrifies you
That's me

PROLOGUE

Sara Linton held the phone to her ear as she watched an intern assess a patient with an open gash on the back of his right arm. The newly minted Dr. Eldin Franklin was not having his best day. He was two hours into his emergency department shift and he'd already had his life threatened by a drug-altered MMA fighter and performed a rectal exam on a homeless woman that had gone very, very wrong.

"Can you believe he said that to me?" Tessa's outrage crackled through the phone, but Sara knew her sister didn't require encouragement to complain about her new husband.

Instead, she kept her eye on Eldin, wincing as he pulled Lidocaine into a syringe like he was Jonas Salk testing the first polio vaccine. He was paying more attention to the vial than he was to his patient.

"I mean," Tessa continued. "He's unbelievable."

Sara made conciliatory noises as she switched the phone to her other ear. She found her tablet and pulled up the chart for Eldin's patient. The gash was a secondary concern. The triage nurse had noted the thirty-one-year-old man was tachycardic with a temperature of 101, and experiencing severe, acute agitation, confusion, and insomnia.

She looked up from her tablet. The patient kept scratching his chest and neck as if something was crawling on his skin. His left foot was shaking so hard that the bed shook along with it. To say that the man was in full-on alcohol withdrawal was to say that the sun was going to rise in the east.

Eldin was picking up on none of the signs—which was not

completely unexpected. Medical school was by design a system that didn't prepare you for the real world. You spent your first year learning how the systems of the body work. Year two was devoted to understanding how those systems could go wrong. By year three, you were allowed to see patients, but only under strict and often needlessly sadistic supervision. Your fourth year brought about the matching system, which was like the worst beauty pageant ever, where you waited to see if your residency was going to be served at a prestigious, major institution or the equivalent of a veterinary clinic in rural East Jesus.

Eldin had managed to match at Grady Memorial Hospital, Atlanta's only public hospital and one of the busiest Level I trauma centers in the country. He was called an intern because he was still in the first year of his residency. Unfortunately, that didn't stop him from believing that he had seen it all. Sara could tell his brain had already checked out as he leaned over the patient's arm and began numbing the area. Eldin was likely thinking about dinner or a girl he was going to call or maybe compounding the interest on his many student loans, which roughly equaled the cost of a house.

Sara caught the head nurse's eye. Johna was watching Eldin, too, but like every nurse ever, she was going to let the baby doctor learn the hard way. It didn't take long.

The patient pitched forward and opened his mouth.

"Eldin!" Sara called, but she was too late.

Vomit blasted like a fireman's hose down the back of Eldin's shirt.

He staggered, experiencing a moment of shock before starting to dry heave.

Sara stayed in her chair behind the nurses' station as the patient fell back against the bed, a momentary sense of relief washing over his face. Johna pulled Eldin to the side and began to lecture him as if he were a toddler. His mortified expression was familiar. Sara had interned at Grady. She had been on the receiving end of similar lectures. No one warned you in medical school that this was how you learned how to be a real doctor—humiliation and vomit.

"Sara?" Tessa said. "Are you even listening to me?"

"Yes. Sorry." Sara tried to turn her focus back to her sister. "What were you saying?"

"I was saying how hard is it for him to see the fucking trash can is full?" Tessa barely paused for a breath. "I work all day, too, but I'm the one who has to come home and clean the house *and* fold the laundry *and* cook dinner *and* take out the trash?"

Sara kept her mouth shut. None of Tessa's complaints were new or unpredictable. Lemuel Ward was one of the most self-involved assholes Sara had ever met, which was saying a lot considering she had spent her adult life working in medicine.

"It's like I got secretly signed up for *The Handmaid's Tale*."

"Was that from the show or the book?" Sara worked to keep the bite out of her tone. "I don't remember a taking-out-the-trash scene."

"You can't tell me that's not how it started."

"Dr. Linton?" Kiki, one of the porters, rapped her fingers on the counter. "Curtain three is being brought back up from X-ray."

Sara mouthed a thank-you as she checked her tablet for the films. The patient from curtain three was a thirty-nine-year-old schizophrenic who had signed himself in as Deacon Sledgehammer and presented with a golf-ball-sized welt on his neck, a temperature of 102 and uncontrollable chills. He'd freely admitted to a nearly lifelong heroin addiction. Subsequent to the veins in his legs, arms, feet, chest and belly collapsing, he'd resorted to injecting subcutaneously, or what was called "skin-popping." Then he'd started injecting directly into his jugular and carotid arteries. X-rays confirmed what Sara had suspected, but she took no pleasure in being right.

"My time is just as valuable as his," Tessa said. "It's fucking ridiculous."

Sara agreed, but she said nothing as she walked through the emergency department. Usually, this time of night they were covered up in gunshot wounds, stabbings, car accidents, overdoses and a fair share of heart attacks. Maybe it was the rain or the Braves playing Tampa Bay, but the department was blissfully calm. Most of the beds were empty, the whirs and beeps of machines punctuating occasional conversation. Sara was technically the attending pediatrician, but she'd offered to cover for another

doctor so that he could attend his daughter's science fair. Eight hours into a twelve-hour shift, the worst thing that Sara had seen was Eldin getting splattered.

And to be honest, that had been kind of hilarious.

"Obviously, Mom was no help," Tessa continued. "All she said was, 'A bad marriage is still a marriage.' What does that even mean?"

Sara ignored the question as she punched the button to open the doors. "Tessie, you've been married for six months. If you're not happy with him now—"

"I didn't say I'm not happy," Tessa insisted, though every word out of her mouth indicated otherwise. "I'm just frustrated."

"Welcome to marriage." Sara walked toward the bank of elevators. "You'll spend ten minutes arguing that you already told him something instead of just telling him again."

"That's your advice?"

"I've been really careful not to offer any," Sara pointed out. "Look, this sounds like a shitty thing to say, but you either find a way to work it out or you don't."

"You found a way to work it out with Jeffrey."

Reflexively, Sara pressed her hand to her heart, but time had eased the sharp pain that usually accompanied any reminder of her widowhood. "Are you forgetting I divorced him?"

"Are you forgetting I was there when it happened?" Tessa paused for a quick breath. "You worked it out. You married him again. You were happy."

"I was," Sara agreed, but Tessa's problem wasn't an affair or even an overflowing trash can. It was being married to a man who did not respect her. "I'm not holding out on you. There's not a universal solution. Every relationship is different."

"Sure, but—"

Tessa's voice fell away as the elevator doors slid open. The distant beeps and whirs of machinery faded. Sara felt an electric current in the air.

Special Agent Will Trent was standing at the back of the elevator. He was looking down at his phone, which allowed Sara the luxury of silently drinking him in. Tall and lean. Broad shoulders. Will's charcoal three-piece suit couldn't hide his runner's body. His

sandy-blond hair was wet from the rain. A scar zig-zagged into his left eyebrow. Another scar traced up from his mouth. Sara let her mind ponder the exquisite question of what the scar would feel like if it was pressed against her own lips.

Will looked up. He smiled at Sara.

She smiled back.

"Hello?" Tessa said. "Did you hear what—"

Sara ended the call and tucked the phone into her pocket.

As Will stepped off the elevator, she silently cataloged all the ways she could've made more of an effort to look presentable for this chance meeting, starting with not twisting her long hair into a granny bun on the top of her head and ending with doing a better job of wiping off the ketchup that had dribbled down the front of her scrubs at dinner.

Will's eyes zeroed in on the stain. "Looks like you've got some—"

"Blood," Sara said. "It's blood."

"Sure it's not ketchup?"

She shook her head. "I'm a doctor, so . . ."

"And I'm a detective, so . . ."

They were both grinning by the time Sara noticed that Faith Mitchell, Will's partner, had not only been on the elevator with him but was standing two feet away.

Faith gave a heavy sigh before telling Will, "I'll go start the thing with the thing."

Will's hands went into his pockets as Faith walked toward the patient rooms. He glanced at the floor, then back at Sara, then down the hallway. The silence dragged out to an uncomfortable level, which was Will's particular gift. He was incredibly awkward. It didn't help matters that Sara found herself uncharacteristically tongue-tied around him.

She made herself speak. "It's been a while."

"Two months."

Sara was ridiculously delighted that he knew how much time had passed. She waited for him to say more, but of course he didn't.

She asked, "What brings you here? Are you working on a case?"

"Yes." He seemed relieved to be on familiar ground. "Guy chopped off his neighbor's fingers over a lawnmower dispute. Cops rolled up. He jumped into his car and drove straight into a telephone pole."

"A real criminal mastermind."

There was something about his sudden burst of laughter that made Sara's heart do a weird flip. She tried to keep him talking. "That sounds like an Atlanta police problem, not a case for the Georgia Bureau of Investigation."

"The finger-chopper works for a drug dealer we've been trying to take down. We're hoping we can persuade him to talk."

"You can *chop* down his sentence in return for his testimony."

There was no thrill of his laughter this time. The joke fell so flat that it could've been a piece of sandpaper.

Will shrugged. "That's the plan."

Sara felt a blush working its way up her neck. She desperately tried to find safer ground. "I was waiting for a patient to come up from X-ray. I don't usually hang around elevators."

He nodded, but that was all he offered before the awkwardness roared back in. He rubbed his jaw with his fingers, worrying the faint scar that ran along his sharp jawline and down into the collar of his shirt. The glint of his wedding ring flashed like a warning light. Will noticed her noticing the ring. His hand went back into his pocket.

"Anyway." Sara had to end this before her cheeks burst into flames. "I'm sure Faith is waiting for you. It's good seeing you again, Agent Trent."

"Dr. Linton." Will gave her a slight nod before walking away.

To keep herself from staring longingly after him, Sara took out her phone and texted an apology to her sister for hanging up so abruptly.

Two months.

Will knew how to get in touch with her, but he hadn't gotten in touch.

Then again, Sara knew how to get in touch with Will, but she hadn't either.

She silently went back over their brief exchange, skipping the *chop* joke so that her face didn't start glowing red again. She

couldn't tell if Will was flirting or if he was being polite or if she was being stupid and desperation had set in. What she did know was that Will Trent was married to a former Atlanta police detective with a reputation for being a raging bitch and a regular habit of disappearing for long stretches of time. And that despite this, he was still wearing his wedding ring.

As Sara's mother would say, *A bad marriage is still a marriage.*

Fortunately, the elevator doors opened before Sara could spiral any farther down that rabbit hole.

"Hey, doc." Deacon Sledgehammer was slumped in his wheelchair, but he made an effort to straighten up for Sara's benefit. He was wearing a hospital gown and black wool socks. The left side of his neck looked painfully red and swollen. Round scars dotted his arms, legs and forehead from years of skin-popping. "Didja find out what's wrong with me?"

"I did." Sara took over from the orderly, pushing Deacon down the hall, fighting the urge to turn back toward Will like Lot's wife. "You've got twelve needles broken off in your neck. Several of them have abscessed. That's why your neck is swollen and you're having such a hard time swallowing. You've got a very serious infection."

"Damn." Deacon let out a raspy breath. "That sounds like it could kill me."

"It could." Sara wasn't going to lie to him. "You're going to need surgery to remove the needles, then you'll need to stay here at least a week for IV antibiotics. Your withdrawal will have to be managed, but none of it's going to be easy."

"Shit," he mumbled. "Will you come visit me?"

"Absolutely. I'm off tomorrow, but I'm here all day Sunday." Sara scanned her badge to open the doors. She finally allowed herself to look back at Will. He was at the far end of the hall. She watched until he turned the corner.

"He gave me his socks."

Sara turned back to Deacon.

"Last week when I was over by the capitol." Deacon pointed down to the pair of thick socks he was wearing. "It was cold as hell. Dude took off his socks and gave 'em to me."

Sara's heart did the weird little flip again. "That was kind."

"Fuckin' cop probably bugged 'em." Deacon pressed his finger to his lips to shush her. "Be careful what you say."

"Understood." Sara wasn't going to argue with a schizophrenic suffering from a life-threatening infection. The fact that she had auburn hair and was left-handed had already led to a lengthy discussion.

She angled the chair toward curtain three, then helped transfer Deacon into bed. His arms were skeletal, almost like kindling. He was malnourished. Grime and dirt were clumped into his hair. He was missing several teeth. He was nearly forty, but he looked sixty and moved like he was eighty. She wasn't sure he would make it through another winter. Either the heroin or the elements or another raging infection would get him.

"I know what you're thinking." Deacon leaned back in the bed with an old man's groan. "You wanna call my family."

"Do you want me to call your family?"

"No. And don't be callin' no social services neither." Deacon scratched his arm, his fingernails digging into a round scar. "Listen, I'm a piece of shit, okay?"

"That hasn't been my experience."

"Yeah, well, you got me on a good day." His voice caught on the last word. It was sinking in that he might not see tomorrow. "My mental health being what it is, and my addiction. I mean fuck, I love dope, but I don't make it easy for people."

"You were dealt a bad hand." Sara kept her tone measured. "That doesn't make you a bad person."

"Sure, but what I put my family through—they disowned me ten years ago this June, and I don't blame 'em. I gave 'em plenty of reasons. Lying, stealing, cheating, beating. I told you—a real piece of shit."

Sara leaned her elbows on the bed railing. "What can I do for you?"

"If I don't make it, will you call my mom and let her know? Not so she feels bad or nothin'. Being honest, I think it'll be a relief."

Sara took a pen and pad out of her pocket. "Write down her name and number."

"Tell her I wasn't scared." He pressed the pen so hard into the

paper that Sara could hear the scratch. Tears seeped from his eyes. "Tell her that I didn't blame her. And that—tell her that I loved her."

"I hope it doesn't come to that, but I promise I'll call her if it does."

"But not before, okay? Cause she don't need to know I'm alive. Just if I'm . . ." His voice trailed off. His hands shook as he returned the pad and pen. "You know what I'm saying."

"I do." Sara briefly rested her hand on his shoulder. "Let me call up to surgery. We'll get a central line started so I can give you something to help make you comfortable."

"Thanks, doc."

Sara closed the curtain behind her. She picked up the phone behind the nurses' station and paged surgical for a consult, then tapped in the orders for the central line.

"Hey." Eldin had showered and changed into a fresh pair of scrubs. "I front-loaded my drunk with IV diazepam. He's waiting for a bed."

"Add multivitamins and 500 milligrams thiamine IV to prevent—"

"Wernicke's encephalopathy," Eldin said. "Good idea."

Sara thought he sounded a little too confident for someone who'd just been sprayed with projectile vomit. As his supervisor—even if it was only for the night—it was her job to set him straight so that it didn't happen again.

She said, "Eldin, it's not an idea, it's a treatment protocol to prevent seizures and to calm the patient. Detox is hell on earth. Your patient is clearly suffering. He's not a drunk. He's a thirty-one-year-old man who's struggling with alcohol addiction."

Eldin had the decency to look embarrassed. "Okay. You're right."

Sara wasn't finished. "Did you read the nurse's notes? She took a detailed social history. He self-reported four to five beers a day. Is there a rule of thumb they taught you last year?"

"Always double the number of drinks a patient reports."

"Correct," she said. "Your patient also reported that he was trying to quit. He stopped cold turkey three days ago. It's right there in his chart."

Eldin's expression turned from embarrassed to outraged. "Why didn't Johna tell me?"

"Why didn't you read her notes? Why didn't you notice your patient had acute onset super-flu, and was scratching at phantom ants crawling on his skin?" Sara watched the shame return, which was to his credit. He recognized that he was the one to blame. "Learn from this, Eldin. Serve your patient better the next time."

"You're right. I'm sorry." Eldin took a deep breath and hushed it out. "Jesus, am I ever going to get the hang of this?"

Sara couldn't leave him lying in the dirt. "I'll tell you what my attending told me: I believe you're either a damn good doctor, or you're a psychopath who's managed to fool the smartest person who's ever supervised you."

Eldin laughed. "Can I ask you a question?"

"Sure."

"You did your residency here, right?" He waited for Sara to nod. "I heard you were locked in for a fellowship with Nygaard. Pediatric cardiothoracic surgery. That's hella impressive. Why did you leave?"

Sara was trying to formulate an answer when she felt another change in the air. This wasn't the electric current she'd felt when she'd seen Will Trent standing at the back of the elevator. This was years of her doctor's intuition telling her that the rest of the night was about to go sideways.

The doors to the ambulance bay burst open. Johna was running down the hall. "Sara, MVA happened right outside. Mercedes versus ambulance. They're pulling the victim from the car right now."

Sara jogged toward the trauma bay with Eldin close behind. She could feel his anxiety ramping up, so she kept her voice calm, telling him, "Do exactly as I say. Don't get in the way."

She was slipping on a sterile gown when EMTs rushed in with the patient strapped to a gurney. They were all soaking wet from the rain. One of them called out the details. "Dani Cooper, nineteen-year-old female, MVA with LOC, chest pain, shortness of breath. She was going about thirty when she hit the ambulance straight-on. Abdominal wound looks superficial. BP is 80 over 40,

heart rate's 108. Breath sounds are shallow on the left, clear on the right. She's alert and oriented. IV in the right hand with normal saline."

Suddenly, the trauma bay was crowded with people in a well-choreographed, disarrayed ballet. Nurses, respiratory therapist, radiographer, transcriber. Every person had a purpose: running lines, drawing blood gas, cross and typing, cutting off clothes, wrapping the blood pressure cuff, pulse ox, leads, oxygen, and someone to track every step that was taken and by whom.

Sara called out, "I need a chem twelve with differential, chest and abdomen X-rays, and a second large-bore IV for blood in case we need it. Start a foley and get routine urine and drug screen. I need a CT of her neck and head. Page CV surgery to be on standby."

The EMTs transferred the patient onto the bed. The young woman's face was white. Her teeth were chattering, eyes wild.

"Dani," Sara said. "I'm Dr. Linton. I'm going to take care of you. Can you tell me what happened?"

"C-c-car . . ." Dani could barely manage a whisper. "I w-woke up in the . . ."

Her teeth were chattering too hard for her to finish.

"That's okay. Where does it hurt? Can you show me?"

Sara watched Dani reach toward her upper left abdomen. The EMTs had already placed a piece of gauze over the superficial laceration just below her left chest. There was more than that, though. Dani's torso was slashed dark red where something, possibly the steering wheel, had hit her with force. Sara used her stethoscope, pressing it to the belly, then listening to both lungs.

She called out, "Bowel sounds are good. Dani, can you take a deep breath for me?"

There was a wheezing of labored air.

Sara told the room, "Pneumothorax on the left. Prep for a chest tube. I need a thoracostomy tray."

Dani's eyes tried to follow the flurry of movement. Cabinets were opened, trays were loaded up—drapes, tubing, Betadine, sterile gloves, scalpel, Lidocaine.

"Dani, it's all right." Sara leaned down, trying to pull the

woman's attention away from the chaos. "Look at me. Your lung is collapsed. We're going to put in a tube to—"

"I d-didn't . . ." Dani labored for breath. Her voice was barely audible over the din of noise. "I had to get away . . ."

"Okay." Sara brushed back her hair, checking for signs of head trauma. There was a reason Dani had lost consciousness at the scene. "Does your head hurt?"

"Yes . . . it . . . I keep hearing ringing and . . ."

"All right." Sara checked her pupils. The woman was clearly concussed. "Dani, can you tell me where it hurts the most?"

"H-he hurt me," Dani said. "I think . . . I think he raped me."

Sara felt a jolt of shock. The sounds in the room faded so that all she could hear was Dani's strained voice.

"He drugged my drink . . ." Dani coughed as she tried to swallow. "I woke up and he . . . he was on top of me . . . then I was in the car, but I don't remember how . . . and . . ."

"Who?" Sara asked. "Who raped you?"

The woman's eyelids started to flutter.

"Dani? Stay with me." Sara cupped her hand to the woman's face. Her lips were losing color. "I need that chest tube now."

"Stop him . . ." Dani said. "Please . . . stop him."

"Stop who?" Sara asked. "Dani? Dani?"

Dani's eyes locked onto Sara's, silently begging her to understand.

"Dani?"

Her eyelids started to flutter again. Then they stilled. Her head fell to the side.

"Dani?" Sara pressed her stethoscope to Dani's chest. Nothing. The nineteen-year-old's life was slipping away. Sara put her panic in another place, telling the room, "We've lost the heartbeat. Starting CPR."

The respiratory therapist grabbed the Ambu bag and mask to start forcing air into the lungs. Sara interlaced her fingers and placed her palms over Dani's heart. CPR was a stop-gap measure intended to manually push blood into the heart and up to the brain until they could hopefully shock the heart back into a regular rhythm. Sara pressed down into Dani's chest with her full weight. There was a sickening crack as the ribs gave way.

“Shit!” Sara felt her emotions threaten to take over. She reined herself back in. “She has a flail chest. CPR is no good. We need to shock her.”

Johna had already brought over the crash cart. Sara could hear the defibrillator reaching full charge as the paddles were pressed to Dani’s limp body.

Sara held up her hands, keeping them away from the metal bed.

“Clear!” Johna pressed the buttons on the paddles.

Dani’s body lurched from three thousand volts of electricity aimed directly into her chest. The monitor blipped. They all waited the interminable few seconds to see if the heart restarted, but the line on the monitor flattened as the alarm wailed.

“Again,” Sara said.

Johna waited for the charge. Another shock. Another blip. Another flat line.

Sara ran through the options. No CPR. No shocking her. No cracking open her chest because there was nothing to crack. A flail chest was described as two or more contiguous ribs broken in two or more places, resulting in a destabilization in the chest wall that altered the mechanics of breathing.

From what Sara could tell, Dani Cooper’s second, third and fifth ribs had sustained multiple fractures from blunt force trauma. The sharp bones were free-floating inside her chest, capable of slicing into her heart and lungs. The nineteen-year-old’s chance of survival had dropped into the single digits.

All the noises that Sara had blocked out as she worked on Dani suddenly filled her brain. The useless hiss of oxygen. The grinding groan of the blood pressure cuff. The crinkling of PPE as they all silently played the diminished odds.

Someone turned off the alarm.

“Okay.” Sara spoke the word to herself and no one else. She had a plan. She peeled off the gauze covering the laceration on Dani’s left side. She poured Betadine into the wound, letting it spill over like a fountain. “Eldin, tell me about the costal margin.”

“Uh—” Eldin watched Sara’s hands work as she slipped on a fresh pair of sterile gloves. “The costal margin is composed of the costal cartilage anteriorly around and up to the sternum. The eleventh and twelfth ribs float.”

"In general, they terminate about the mid-axillary line and within the muscular of the lateral wall. Right?"

"Right."

Sara picked up a scalpel from the tray. She cut into the laceration, carefully incising the fatty layer down to the abdominal muscle. Then she cut through to the diaphragm to make a hole about the size of her fist.

She looked at Johna. The nurse's lips were parted in surprise, but she nodded. If Dani had any chance of survival, this was it.

Sara reached her hand into the hole. The diaphragm muscle sucked around her wrist. Rib bones traced along the back of her knuckles like the keys of a xylophone. The lung had flattened to an airless balloon. The stomach and spleen were slick and supple. Sara closed her eyes, concentrating on the anatomy as she reached into Dani's chest. The tips of her fingers brushed against the blood-filled sac of the heart. Carefully, Sara wrapped her hand around the organ. She looked at the monitor and squeezed.

The flatline jumped.

She squeezed again.

Another jump.

Sara kept pumping blood through the heart, flexing her fingers and thumb, forcing the rhythm into the normal cadence of life. Her eyes closed again as she listened for a beep from the monitor. She could feel the roadmap of arteries like a topographical drawing. Right coronary artery. Posterior descending artery. Right marginal artery. Left anterior descending artery. Circumflex artery.

Of all the organs in the body, the heart was the one that inspired the most emotion. Your heart could be broken or filled with love or joy, or it could do a weird little flip when you saw your favorite crush in the elevator. You covered your heart to pledge allegiance. You patted your hand over your heart to convey fealty or honesty or respect. Someone who was cruel might be called heartless. In the South, you said *bless your heart* to someone who was not particularly bright. An act of kindness *does your heart good*. When Sara and Tessa were little, Tessa had often crossed her

heart. She would steal Sara's clothes or a CD or a book and swear that she didn't do it—*cross my heart, hope to die*.

Sara wasn't sure whether or not Dani Cooper would die, but she made a promise on the woman's heart that she would do everything she could to stop the man who'd raped her.