

Part of a longer work titled *Thirteen Bodies*

Chapter 1

“What the hell were you thinking?”

My throat was dry. I swallowed, in an effort to answer her. Words failed me, but it was alright; she would’ve cut me off anyway.

“What are we going to do?” her voice was shrill, her face in her hands as she fiercely shook her head. “Jesse, we have to call the police.” She swept her hair off her face, her fingers trembling, more from nerves rather than the bite from the October winds.

“It was an accident,” I braced myself. I couldn’t put my face in my hands too; that would just piss Victoria off even more. “I mean, he’s not dead. Right?” We knew he wasn’t dead; I’d wasted no time rushing to find his pulse.

“Brilliant observation,” Victoria said, nodding with a disbelieving and also exasperated look in her green eyes. “Brilliant. This is still a heavy situation, don’t you know that?” she snapped at me.

“I know. We’ll figure it out. Call the police, get this sorted out,” I tried to sound confident, but I was scared. I didn’t know how I’d managed to run the man over. All I knew was that I was in trouble and I wanted more than anything to go back ten minutes.

“Why couldn’t you keep your eyes on the road?”

“I don’t know what happened,” I said, my voice weak as guilt settled. “He literally came out of nowhere.”

It wasn’t a lie. We’d been talking, I’d been driving. Just reminiscing about old times when all of a sudden Victoria was screaming and I was shaking as I braked the car harder than

I'd ever remembered trying to brake. The shriek of the brake was still clear in my mind, but I was nearly sure with Victoria screaming at me I'd forget it soon enough.

She didn't answer me for a second, rather studied the collapsed figure lying on the wet pavement in front of my father's '67 Chevy Impala that he would never let me borrow ever again. I was too stressed to look at the guy. Maybe if I didn't look at him, he would disappear and so would my charges.

"I don't know what we're going to do."

"It's odd that he's out so late at night," I mumbled. It was odd enough. It was a quarter to eleven in late October, with freezing rain.

"I guess the police will ask him for his testimony," Victoria ran her hand through her curly brown hair. Her green eyes looked washed out against the rain and she sighed deeply.

"We just got to find a phone."

"Where are we going to find one?" she gestured around. It was true; we were on a stretch of paved country road, not a single house on it for miles. Tall trees framing the street on one side, the other side with tall corn stalks. There was a pond twenty feet up the road, but that was as far as I could see. The only light was from the car headlights, and I couldn't see any street signs. Definitely no phones.

"We can take the car," I gestured back, looking at her like she was an idiot. She narrowed her eyes.

"I'm not letting you drive again."

My mouth fell open. "What are you proposing? You don't even have your license!"

She shrugged. "I'm sure that driving illegally looks better than hitting a man with a car."

“You’re insane.” I looked down from her and was forced to see the poor figure on the pavement. My luck had failed; neglecting to look at him didn’t make him disappear as one might suspect.

He was an older man, no taller than five foot seven, with graying black hair. He wore a nice suit, a fancy silk red tie, and black business shoes. As he laid there on his back, there was a trickle of blood at the edge of his lip and also on the side of his face, outlining around his ear.

It had occurred odd to me that he would walk in the rain in such a nice suit, but I wasn’t sure how we’d bring that up to the police when we called them. They’d be more concerned about how I’d accidentally hit him with my car while I had my bright lights on.

I looked back up at Victoria. All the while she’d been standing there, thinking deeply.

“So what are we doing?”

“Jesse, I’m driving,” she stepped towards me and pushed a curl behind her ear. “If we’re lucky, I’ll only have to drive a couple miles or two.”

Then she climbed back in the driver’s seat, to leave me to hoist the poor old man into the back. I lifted the unconscious man into the back seat of the impala, consciously noting where his blood met the seats so I’d be sure to scrub it off before I returned the car to my dad. I tried to sit him up but he only slouched so I laid him across, voiding seatbelts. I knocked on the window and she unrolled it.

“What?”

“What exactly are we doing?”

She sighed. “Jesse, we’re trying to find a phone,” I knew I should refrain from asking any more questions and luckily I didn’t have any.

“The car has plenty of gas though, doesn’t it?” Victoria asked hopefully.

“Probably,” I answered shortly, though I knew in all honesty not that much.

“Right okay so I guess we’ll just try and find a house with lights on then and ask to use the phone.”

“That is literally the premise of every single horror movie ever made.”

Victoria sighed. “Do you have a better suggestion?”

I didn’t answer because I didn’t.

I got into the passenger seat quietly, and instinctively I looked over at her. She was sitting silently, looking out the window. Her pretty brown hair was curled today, tresses and tendrils on her shoulders and lying on her neck, some brushing past her cheeks as she rested her face on her fist. Rain drops was flecked through it, but she still looked angelic as she sat, her cheeks rosy from the cold. Her green eyes looked brighter with her makeup, but at that second she looked stressed, and then I noticed her fingers drumming gently on her leg, in no particular order. Just rushed and jittered.

I put a hand on her arm, and I rubbed it up and down. She looked over at me. “I’m sorry I’m a moron.”

Her lips split into a smile. “I’m sorry if I was short with you. I just didn’t picture our last date for a while going like this,” and then she shrugged, calling more attention to the rosiness in her cheeks.

“No I would’ve planned it better,” I agreed.

“It won’t be as bad, will it?” Though her nerves obviously hadn’t gone away completely, she seemed a little more optimistic for a good ending to this.

“I hope not.”

We spent the rest of the ride in silence, while I nervously looked over at the gas gauge. The needle was pointing dangerously close to the empty symbol, but Victoria didn't seem to notice.

“Hey, want to hear a skeleton pun?” I asked, hoping as we passed the lake that the gas could last to the house and to a gas station, despite knowing that was a fool's wish.

“I'm listening.”

“What did the skeleton say behind the vampire's back?”

“His skin is pale?”

“What?” I asked, talking at an unnecessarily loud volume to block the soft ding, signaling the end of the gas tank.

“His skin is pale?” Victoria repeated, confused. “Why are you talking so loud?”

“I don't know, what are you talking about?” I replied, talking louder still. The ding was getting a little louder now, urgency increasing as she turned left down a long stretch of road, as my eyes were searching for any house on the road that looked friendly enough to stop at.

“What's the answer to the pun?”

“Why did you think he would mention the pale skin? Skeletons don't even have skin!” At that point I had nearly forgotten the dinging noise, confused as to Victoria's lack of appreciation of wordplay.

“I thought it was a skeleton talking about a vampire!” she sounded exasperated then, her tone nearing as loud as I was talking.

“It was! The skeleton said the vampire sucks!” And then she looked shrewdly at me, and I heard the beeping again. I spoke fast. “Hey why couldn't the skeleton ride the roller coaster?”

“The speed and velocity would cause his body to fall apart?”

“Skeletons don’t have bodies! It’s because he weighed a skele-*ton*!”

Victoria looked at me, a mixture of amusement and hatred in her eyes.

“How did the vampire shut the skeleton up?”

“How?” she asked, though she seemed slightly put off by another pun.

“He told her that she was driving him batty.”

She shook her head, looking straight ahead at the road. “That was the worse string of puns I’ve ever heard, but I still love you.”

“Want to hear another one?” I offered, the dinging to the gas gauge getting a little louder and more consistent. Victoria opened her mouth, seeming to ask about it, when I cut her off.

“Why are skeletons such bad liars?”

“You can see right through them?”

“Actually yes, you’re right,” and I bit my lip, feeling relief as Victoria came to a large ugly house on the right with the lights on. There were no other houses for miles, just this lone one and the street that stretched on for who knew how long. Victoria parked in front of it on the street, and she stepped out of the car.

“Here,” and she handed me my keys. I let her go up the driveway and then she turned around, waving at me. I gestured for her to go on without me. She shrugged and kept walking.

I took a final glance at the guy in the back seat, still unconscious. I bit my lip, hoping he wouldn’t recover until after we got the police here. I sighed and turned off the car. I slipped my keys in my pocket, feeling a little better about this whole thing. Then there was a tiny shrill beep that made me jump in the seat and then I realized with cold knowledge that the gas tank was finally empty. I sighed.

Victoria stood, her back to the door waiting for me. With the light illuminating her shadow, darkness was casted on her face.

“Should we leave him in the car or?” she asked, letting her voice fade out when I reached her.

“We’ll just wait to see what they say of the matter,” I answered, knocking on the door.

As if on an entire switch, every light went off in the house. We were suddenly plunged into darkness and Victoria grappled for my hand.

“Guess no one was home?” I muttered. Although I couldn’t see her face, I presumed she was rolling her eyes at me.

“They are home; they just don’t want to talk to us.”

“What now?”

Before she could reply, there was a blood curdling scream that reigned over the still silence.

“Did that sound-”

“Like it came from the house?” I finished, and as my eyes were finally adjusted, I could see when she nodded at me.

Another fierce scream broke the night. Victoria regained a tighter grip on my wrist. “We have to report this,” she whispered, gesturing madly at the door, nearly pulling me to it.

“We don’t know where the phone is in there!” I protested, but she brushed past me, up to the door. She bent down so she was eye level with the lock. Victoria studied it while she shuffled earnestly and haphazardly through the contents of her purse. Finally, she let out a frustrated huff

and dumped everything out on the porch. What I assumed to be a tube of lipstick rolled beside my foot.

“Victoria, the lights aren’t even on in there. We don’t even know where the phone is regardless, if the lights were to go back on.”

“We need to use a phone,” she argued, reaching up for something in her hair. She pulled out something small and thin out of her hair and lifted it up into the moon light. “Here goes nothing,” she whispered, more to herself than me.

“What exactly are you planning to do with that?”

“Shut up and don’t stand so close to me,” and then after a beat she handed me something no longer and no thicker than my ring finger.

“Turn that on and shine it on an angle toward the lock. Make sure it’s away from my face,” she muttered, a little impatiently.

“We’re already in enough trouble. Why are we adding trespassing to the list?”

“Technically this is breaking *and* entering.”

“But why are we entering?”

Victoria sighed, pausing to look up at me through the light of the flashlight.

I stared at her, she stared back. Her green eyes were fierce, and her face was overwhelmingly pale in the ill light. She looked tired, her energy waning. But here she was endless determination. It was one of the things I liked most about her.

“We need to report to the police.”

“But why here? Don’t you have a bad feeling about this place?”

“Don’t be so paranoid,” Victoria brushed another tendril away from her face. It fell back by her eyes.



I swallowed, trying to express this large doubt in the pit of my stomach. The doubt about this being a good idea.

“No really, Jesse. You know this as well as I do. We just have to get this done.”

“Are you sure we have to?”

She looked at me pointedly.

“Okay.” I shut myself up after that.

There were several moments of silence while the only faint sounds include Victoria’s concentrated breathing and the tiny internal clicking in the door jack. There was also my whispered commentary which Victoria dismissed at once.

“Though it isn’t her first rodeo, Victoria seems to take her sweet old time while spectators stand by and freeze.”

The clicking stopped and she looked me dead in the eye through the flashlight.

“Could you try to work on not being a pain in the ass?” she asked me, and then without waiting for my reply, she returned to her work, intense precision in her green eyes.

It was only moments after that she dropped the bobby pin and stood up, rubbing the small of her back. Then she stood up straight and turned the knob, giving little energy as the door flew open.

“I call getting the flashlight.”

She looked up at me from the ground; scrambling to recover all the contents of her purse off the porch. “We’re not separating. You’re going first though since you have the light.”

I plunged forward into the darkness, trying to steady the flashlight despite my shaking hands. Victoria grabbed my other hand and we ventured further into the dark.

The inside foyer of the house was an impressive size. It stretched out about twenty feet into a long hall with several doors on either side. There was a staircase as well but I couldn't see any further past it. Victoria's grip on my hand got tighter, tighter than when the lights had first gone out.

"We should probably look for the kitchen," she swallowed. I nodded and then when I realized that she couldn't see me, I cleared my throat and whispered in agreement.

"Affirmative."

We came to a set of double doors and I shined the flashlight on the handles. Victoria hesitated.

"Do you want *me* to open them?"

"Yeah," she whispered. I rolled my eyes and pushed them open, similar to how Victoria had done to the front door, a smirk across my face.

We treaded carefully across the floor, our feet light against the tiles, checked in black and white. Victoria breathed heavily right beside me, and there was a soft pattering. I stopped at once and looked at her. The pattering stopped.

"Sorry," she breathed, and I looked down at her other hand, shaking so hard it was actually visible.

"This is going to be fine," I promised. "We're only in the dark. There's really no reason to be worried." I was totally worried though. I'd proven that on the porch, but Victoria had neglected to listen to me.

"I would totally agree except for the fact that this feels like a horror movie," she said.

"Well yeah there's that too. But honestly, other than that," I began and then Victoria shushed me.

“I found the phone.”

“Are you sure it’ll still work-“ I began but I stopped speaking when there was the familiar archaic beep of a home phone with the curly cord that Victoria began, in an anxious fit, to wrap loosely around her fingers.

“Yes hi my name’s Victoria. I’ve called to report an accident. I had to borrow a phone at 467 Jade Lane. Yes, please send some extra help. Stuff has happened,” she paused. “Thank you. Yes thank you very much.” Then there was the beep of a disconnected phone.

“Hey wait, I’m going to try to call my mom, alright?” Victoria said.

“I’m going to find a bathroom,” and I turned to go. Sure I was scared, but the urge to urinate was very, very intense.

“Don’t you think I should have the flashlight?”

“Uh no,” I said. “I’m the one who’s going to be walking around. You’re staying in one place, give me a reason why you’d need it more than I do.”

“Just go to the bathroom and come right back.”

“Where else would I be planning to go?”

She didn't answer so I left, the flashlight held tightly in my hand. There was the typical sickening feeling, a feeling I was being closely watched. My heart was pounding in my ears, clearly and as sound as a drum. I'd passed about four doors when I heard a loud crack that made every vein rush. I licked my lips.

"Victoria?" I called out, nearly fearing I wouldn't hear an answer.

"Did you hear it?" she whispered, running out to meet me. She stumbled into my arms.

"Hear that?" I asked, my voice shaking. I wrapped my arms around her, thankful she was real. Thankful she was solid. Perfect consistency for a human shield.

"Yes," she replied, breathing heavily as if she'd run a mile. "What was it? Do you think it was gun shot?"

"It sounded like it," I scratched the back of my neck. "Was it from in the house?" I adjusted my grip on the flashlight so it didn't glare directly in Victoria's eyes.

"It must've been it was so loud and clear. I'll feel better if we leave here sooner than later."

"We can if you want to stand in the rain. Or we can stay in the car."

Her soft reply was muddled by another loud crack.

“It felt like it came from upstairs.”

“I’m not investigating.”

“Jesse, please, please can we leave?” Victoria mumbled, her fingers trembling in my hand.

“We have to stay long enough for the police to arrive. Then we can get a ride with them.”

“Why wouldn’t we just take your car?”

“Minor details.”

“What kind of minor details?”

“Well I mean it’s part of evidence in the accident and not to mention, the car’s out of gas,” I let my voice get quieter towards the end and I bit my lip, waiting for Victoria’s reply.

“Oh my God.”

“Sorry,” I said shortly, hoping she wouldn’t hurt me too much.

“Oh my God,” she repeated. The tone of her voice was dead, as if she didn’t realize what she’d said. I began to anticipate a swift punch to my arm or practically anywhere else about the gas. But instead something much worse happened. She grappled for the flashlight in my hands. “Jesse, please can I see that?” she mumbled, not waiting for a reply. She took the flashlight and shined it up a few feet above me, her face pale.

“We have to leave. Now.”

“What are you even talking about?”

“Jesse, remember when you said this was a bad idea?” She looked near to tears.

“Yes but I don’t understand,” I began, but she grabbed my arm, squeezing so effectively that the circulation temporarily stopped.

“Don’t. Look. Behind. You.” she whispered, her grip on my arm getting slightly tighter with every syllable. My fingers felt numb.

“What do you mean?” I asked again, still confused. Normally she would’ve rolled her eyes at me, but whatever she had seen cured her of her habit.

“Look on the floor.” She hissed, moving the flashlight down between us, returning her gaze to where it had been; beyond and slightly above me.

I looked down in the faux light, seeing what looked to be a large spill on the tile between our feet. The edges weren't visible in this eye line, so I only assumed it was a lot bigger than this simple trail. I bit the inside of my cheek as I tried to focus on it. The puddle was a dark purple, appeared to be very rich. I groaned.

“That's not-“I began.

“It's worse,” she insisted, still not looking at me. “It's so much worse.” Before I could reply, we were suddenly blinded as light flooded the whole house.

“Is it easier to look at in the dark?” I asked nervously. She didn't answer.

I looked down. The purple puddle in true light was a rich red. It was without a doubt blood, and it was a lot of it. At once I became determined that I wasn't going to look, that I wasn't going to see what took the color out of her skin.

“Do you think they know we're here?” Victoria hissed and then after a second, she added, “you can turn the flashlight off now.”

“I don’t know,” I muttered, “but we might want to consider waiting in the car.” With that I hurried to the front door, my hand on the knob. I faced away, still determined not to look.

‘Trust me’ I thought to myself. ‘You’ll probably feel better if you don’t see it.’

“They probably heard the phone go off,” Victoria muttered, running her hands through her hair. I tried to turn the knob on the door; it wouldn’t budge. I faced the door, my mind feeling numb. I wasn’t going to look.

“We’re locked in,” I mumbled, suddenly feeling dizzy. There was a pressing force on my head. I knew it was truly no more than paranoia, but I scrunched my eyes shut tightly. I wasn’t going to look.

“No, no,” Victoria muttered, covering her ears with her hands. “No, I picked the lock, it doesn’t lock from the outside.”

I gestured at the knob. “Why don’t you try it?” I kept my gaze locked on her face. Training myself to only see her, nothing past her. Nothing past the blood puddle on the floor.

She placed a reluctant hand around the door knob and tried to pull it towards herself. As it had for me; it remained bugged. I looked on the floor. I wasn’t going to look.

“Don’t you have another bobby pin in your purse?” I took the second to look at her, and then I saw it without meaning to.



Past the puddle of blood, there was a grotesque blood stain on the wall. I could've salvaged if I would've looked away right before that, but I let my eyes wander an inch farther. I choked on air.

Between the bars of the stairwell, before the second flight, there was a short landing. On the landing was a simple wooden chair, and in the chair was a woman sitting. Her dress, a lavender number, was stained in dried blood and her face, although perhaps pretty in life, was now only terrifying. Her chin was simple, her nose was petite, but her eyes were gone. The rest of her face until the roots of her dyed blonde hair was covered in blood, thick like paint. Her mouth was left, as if she was smiling. I gagged.

“No,” Victoria mumbled, shaking her head. “And I probably left the one we used outside! How did we get locked in?”

“I don't know,” I answered, pulling my eyes off the woman sitting. “I don't know, I don't know,” then I had a thought. “You said you called your mom right? What did she say? She knows we're here doesn't she? Help is already coming.”

“Had to leave a voice mail,” she shrugged, her whole body still shaking. I grabbed her hands.

“We’ll be just fine,” I insisted, rubbing her arm up and down as she nodded at me, still looking like she might get sick.

“Right, right. Whatever you say. I believe you,” she agreed, nodding again, looking into my eyes. I tried to focus completely on Victoria, blocking the sitting woman out of my view. “I believe you,” Victoria repeated.

If only I could believe it myself.